

**Mind the gap –**

**A critical assessment of intended and experienced learning outcomes of the  
MPhil programme Comparative and International Education**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	5
Structure of the thesis	6
Chapter 1 Introduction	7
1.1 Research rationale and principle research questions	7
1.2 Operationalization of key concepts	9
1.2.1 Critical thinking and critical pedagogy	9
1.2.2 Critical thinking	10
1.2.3 Critical pedagogy	11
1.2.4 Biases	11
1.2.5 Similarities	12
1.2.6 Criticism	12
1.2.7 How to measure critical thinking	13
1.3 Literature and related research	14
1.4 Scope and limitations	17
1.5 Method	17
Chapter 2 The global classroom – a contextualization of the CIE programme	18
2.1 Conceptual framework	18
2.1.1 Discourse	19
2.1.2 Globalization	20
2.1.3 Development	22
2.1.4 Power	23
2.1.5 Globalization and education	24
2.2 Concluding remarks	27
Chapter 3 A short history of the programme	28
3.1 Internationalization – regional and national efforts	28
3.1.1 The University of Oslo and internationalization	29
3.1.2 Academic and practical preconditions	29
3.1.3 The structure of the programme	30
3.1.4 Admission requirements	31
3.1.5 Intended learning outcomes	32
3.2 Concluding remarks	32
Chapter 4 Methods	33

4. 1 Introduction	33
4.2 Personal biases	34
4.2.1 Triangulated reflexivity	37
4.3 Cross cultural interviewing	38
4.4 Validity	40
4.5 Procedure	41
4.5.1 Sampling	41
4.6. Participant observation	41
4.7 Field notes	42
4.7.1 Formal notes	43
4.7.2 Informal notes	43
4.8 Research design	43
4.9 Data collection methods	44
4.9.1 The questionnaire	44
4.9.2 Semi – structured interviews	45
4.9.3 Location	47
4.9.4 Recording	47
4.9.5 Transcription of interviews	48
4.10 Analyzing the interviews	49
4.11 Analyzing the questionnaire	49
4.12 Coding the respondents' feedback	50
4.13 Concluding remarks	50
Chapter 5 Findings and analysis	51
5.1 Introduction	51
5.2 Acquiring a critical outlook	52
5.3 Organization of the programme	57
5.4 Syllabuses	60
5.4.1 Theoretical training	60
5.4.2 Geographical outlook	64
5.5 Interdisciplinarity	67
5.6 A general finding	68
5.7 Comparing findings with Mtsewiga	69
5.8 Concluding remarks	71
Chapter 6 Concluding remarks and unsolved questions	72

## APPENDICES

- Appendix I: Interview guide  
Appendix II: Self completion questionnaire  
Appendix III: Interview consent form

## ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this research is to discover if and how the first year of the masters programme in comparative and international education fulfils the ambitious approach stated in the programme's description of learning outcomes. Has the MPhil programme Comparative and international education attained its goals in giving the students: "a broad understanding", "training in solving complex issues within a wide range of theoretical frameworks", and a "critical outlook"? In order to investigate these questions further I have posed three main research questions.

1. Have the students acquired an attitude of critical outlook and broad understanding of comparative and international education as a result of participating in the programme?
2. Have the students' been trained in solving complex issues within a wide range of theoretical frameworks during the programme?
3. How can this acquisition/lack of acquisition be explained by analyzing the educational curriculum applied in the course?

To make this assessment of the performance of the programme, the students' experienced learning outcome has been mapped. The research has been based on in- dept interviews with 13 students and 3 staff members. The students have in addition answered a qualitative questionnaire which has measured their progress on different themes found on the syllabus. These findings have been analyzed through meaning condensation and coding.

It is possible to conclude that the CIE programme faces challenges in having students attain the abovementioned goals. *These have been defined as: defining its aims, communicating these aims to the students, and in building an identity between the field of comparative and international education and the students.* It is however important to point out that the programme has many untapped possibilities that can be developed further.

## **STRUCTURE OF THESIS**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This introductory chapter presents the research rationale and principle research questions. Concepts applied in the research description are operationalized. A short review of literature and related research is given together with an exemplification of the scope and limitations of the paper. Method is briefly touched upon.

### **Chapter 2: The global classroom – a contextualization of CIE**

The second chapter of the thesis places the programme within the broader framework of globalization and higher education. The major concepts within the discourse of globalization are defined as: discourse, power and development. The global, international and national challenges within the field are addressed.

### **Chapter 3: A short history of the programme**

This third chapter sketches out the historical background of the programme and how it came into existence a short history of the programme, its organization, and admission rules is explained in this chapter.

### **Chapter 4: Methodology**

My chapter on methodology includes a thorough presentation of the methodology in general and its application in this paper in particular. Special emphasis is given to the question of research bias since this has been particularly important in this thesis and has proven to be a fruitful approach to explain differences between my research objectives and previous research in the field.

### **Chapter 5: Findings and analysis**

The respondents' answers and considerations as given in the in-depth interviews and questionnaire are described and analyzed. The organization of the programme, the syllabus and the interdisciplinary character of the programme are among the questions discussed here.

### **Chapter 6: Conclusion and unsolved questions**

Here the main findings of the research are summed up and discussed. The extent to which this paper has succeeded to answer the initial research questions will be assessed. Questions still to be answered concludes my paper.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research rationale and principle research questions

As a factual and tangible element of the globalization process in higher education, the CIE programme is a most useful source for grasping the complexity and the challenges of comparative and international education.

In writing this thesis it has furthermore been important to understand how the mechanisms of evaluation and student feedback can change already existing structures at faculty level. *Exit, Voice and Loyalty - responses to decline in firms, organizations and states*, (Hirschman 1970) was presented as a business theory to explain the mechanisms involved in the performance deterioration of factories. According to this theory the customer feedback can take three forms: exit, the customer takes his business somewhere else, voice: the customer gives the company direct feedback on his dissatisfaction, or loyalty: the customer stays with the company hoping for positive change to occur (Hirschman 1970). For the company however the only constructive customer feedback is the direct feedback addressing the reasons for dissatisfaction. Companies which give voice to their customers will achieve improved performance and establish more solid bounds of loyalty with their customers.

In my opinion the importance of giving voice to obtain loyalty and avoid exit is equally relevant to educational institutions as to factories. Especially as education in the time of globalization is exposed to annual quality assessments, competition and benchmarking. What is the level of customer satisfaction at the master programme in Comparative and International Education? Are the students given voice possibilities, are they using this possibility, do they stay loyal because of or in spite of their learning outcomes?

The main purpose of this research is to discover if and how the first year of the masters programme in comparative and international education fulfils the ambitious approach stated in the programme's description of learning outcomes. To make this assessment of the performance of the programme, the students' experienced learning outcome will be mapped.

The approach of the programme is:

“interdisciplinary and emphasises the acquisition of a broad understanding of and a critical outlook on educational institutions, systems and their programmes and curricula, stressing an understanding of the political, cultural, socio-economic and technological aspects of educational development and change. [...] Participants will be trained in solving complex issues within a wide range of theoretical frameworks and provided with a variety of methodological tools.”<sup>1</sup>

Both skills and attitudes are expressed as learning outcomes in the programme’s description. My main focus will be on two set of skills; “broad understanding” and “training in solving complex issues within a wide range of theoretical frameworks”, and on one set of attitudes; “critical outlook”.

**The principal research questions in this paper are:**

1. Have the students acquired an attitude of critical outlook and broad understanding of comparative and international education as a result of participating in the programme?
2. Have the students’ been trained in solving complex issues within a wide range of theoretical frameworks during the programme?
3. How can this acquisition/lack of acquisition be explained by analyzing the educational curriculum applied in the course?

To answer these questions I have:

- Described the rationale and underlying intentions of the course by analysing the arguments presented to the Faculty board prior to its establishment
- Assessed the educational practice (syllabus, teachers’ role, classroom activities etc.) applied in the course
- Mapped the learning outcome as experienced by the students.

Thus the thesis will be an attempt to apply the methods and knowledge acquired through the course to critically asses the educational practice applied, and to evaluate its results in terms of *if* and *how* it fulfills its own ambitions.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.uio.no/studier/programme/ciedu-master/om/hva-laerer-du.xml>



## 1.2 Operationalization of concepts

### 1.2.1 Critical thinking and critical pedagogy

*Critical outlook* is stated as one of the learning outcomes which the students in CIE are supposed to acquire through their study. The critical outlook is to be applied true “assessing and evaluating educational practice, policies and initiatives taken in a wide variety of social and educational settings.”

What does such a *critical outlook* really entail? According to Merriam Webster’s English dictionary critical is: consisting of or involving criticism, exercising or involving careful judgment or judicious evaluation including variant readings and scholarly emendations<sup>2</sup>. In addition to such a critical outlook the students are also supposed to acquire a *broad understanding* of the field, comparative and international education. Broad according to Merriam Webster’s English dictionary is: having ample extent from side to side or extending far and wide<sup>3</sup>. Understanding according to the same source is: the power of comprehending, especially the capacity to apprehend general relations of particulars, the power to make experience intelligible by applying concepts and categories<sup>4</sup>.

If the CIE students were to acquire a broad understanding and a critical outlook, the programme would have to provide and train them in workable means for identifying and solving problems. To be able to comprehend and use language with accuracy, clarity and discrimination they would need to be taught and trained in conceptual frameworks and theories. To give the students training in solving complex issues within a wide range of theoretical frameworks and provide them with a variety of methodological tools, is stated as a learning outcome of the CIE Programme.

Further, how are these concepts operationalized through the CIE programme? Before entering the programme all students have been equipped with basic tools and concepts of how to see and comprehend the world around them. These terms and concepts are built from different socio economic factors, and from different cultural backgrounds. Thus on entering the class the students create a meeting point between different worldviews. How does the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/critical>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/broad>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/understanding>

CIE programme accommodate or even challenge these worldviews? Are the students enabled to question their presuppositions or are they merely accepted? The process of applying and using existing frameworks should be facilitated focusing on a critical outlook. Burbules and Berk (1999) identify two different directions of how teachers can invoke the possibility for a critical approach; critical thinking and critical pedagogy. I will in the following look at these two directions and discuss briefly on their limitations. I will look deeper into critical thinking as I see it as the most applicable direction of the two, in the CIE programme.

### **1.2.2 Critical thinking**

What does critical thinking entail? Fisher (2001) explains that the term can be seen in connection to the educationist and philosopher John Dewey. He looked at what we today call critical thinking and called it reflective thinking as early as 100 years ago. His definition of the term is “*an active persistent and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds which support it and the further conclusions to which it tends*”. He also emphasised reflexive thinking as an active process, as opposed to prior learning methods, that can be described as passive, with information going from the teacher to the student. More recently Robert Ennis (in Fisher 2001) has described critical thinking *as reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or not*.

Critical thinking concerns itself with the analysis of the more common surroundings of our everyday life and seeks to decode the patterns of our actions (Burbules and Berk 1999). Only in being aware of the reasons for why and how we do the things we do can one truly free oneself from them. Critical thinking looks at how the curriculum should be shaped in order to create a specific order of reasoning. Rationality is, as is truth, crucial goals for the students to achieve (Blodgett –McDeawitt 1995). As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter the student can be seen as a consumer of a particular product. In that case it is important to shape the students to be critical consumers. It is not enough that the student acquires the skills to think critically, he or she must also want to use these skills in order to discover truth and rationality (Paul 1983: 23 in Burbules and Berk 1999). Although critical thinking is a tool it is also a tool built on a specific way of thinking. Who has set the premises? Who has created this method? It is important to identify the power structures and at play. Critics of critical thinking claim that the tool/the way of learning is built on western thoughts that exclude other ways of learning (Burbules and Berk 1999).

Scriven (in Fisher 2001) argues that critical thinking is an academic competency; and concurs with Dewey in that it is to be seen as an active process, Scriven adds “it involves questioning and partly because of the role played by meta-cognition – thinking about ones thinking” (Scriven in Fisher 2001). Critical thinking is the opposite of an instant reaction to a problem. It is about considering how we think about things, to be able to identify what reasoning is being presented when someone is arguing a case and how to present reasoning clearly ourselves.

### **1.2.3 Critical pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy on the other hand, seeks to look beyond the concepts and ways of our every day life, and on who creates the structures that shape our lives (Burbules and Berk 1999). Who are the ones setting the agenda, and who are the ones making the rules? This direction, opposite to critical thinking, is more holistic in its approach, and it sees education as a tool in order to liberate those oppressed by authorities. Paulo Freire’s “Pedagogy of The Oppressed” (1970) relates to this direction in his idea of empowerment and “anti- banking” of knowledge. He emphasises the power of knowledge and that schools and teachers are vital in the fight against injustice and poverty. As mentioned by Scriven (1976), above, critical pedagogy also emphasises the active role of the student. Once acquired the skill of analysing and deciphering the structures and powers at play, the students have to put this knowledge into praxis. This conversion from words to action has to be done through dialogue (Burbules and Berk 1999).

### **1.2.4 Biases**

Crucial in order to use critical thinking and/or critical pedagogy is to be aware of ones own biases. In seeing how ones own cultural and historical background shapes ones perceptions is crucial in order to come closer to both truth, rationality and to empowerment (Fisher 2001). It is important that we strive to overcome and seek the truth and rationality in spite of these presuppositions. We need to adapt a mode of learning and analysing that learning that is built on openness and dialogue rather than a closed and judgemental point of departure (Burbules and Berk 1999). That said it is impossible to avoid, in both critical thinking and critical pedagogy that our lives and our history influence and shape us and our perceptions of the world we live and what the truth entails. Awareness of this is the best way to counteract it.

In questioning our own perceptions in light of our biases we might come to conclude that we need a whole new platform or base to draw conclusions from and that we in fact are in need of a new set of principles and concepts all together. How is this possible within the realm of critical thinking and critical pedagogy? Are they not rigorously expecting their students to follow a certain defined pattern of developing a mindset? (Burbules and Berk 1999) These are important questions that should be examined further, but that are beyond the scope of this thesis.

In order to discuss givens and seek the truth and the empowerment that criticality entails, we need each other. Without social interaction change as a result of challenging views will never come about (Burbules and Berk 1999). In recognizing differences an important ground for new thoughts and new ways of identifying the reality is built. Perhaps it is these often multicultural, inter religious and cross political meeting points and the tension between them that cause the best environment for criticality and not the traditions of neither critical thinking nor critical pedagogy?

### **1.2.5 Similarities**

Although both critical thinking and critical pedagogy are somewhat different there are some common traits. In critical pedagogy there is a common belief that the two directions complete each other, rather than oppose each other.

The most important commonality is the main goal, namely to enable students to look past givens and discover and decode them, in their search for the truth (Burbules and Berk 1999). Both directions identify a need for liberation through education although at the very core of critical pedagogy, more of a context in critical thinking. There is a wish for the students to be empowered and to identify truth and to act in accordance with it.

### **1.2.6 Criticism**

Critical pedagogy can be criticised in the light of critical thinking and vice versa. Are the terms and the concepts dealt with in critical thinking possible to see without the contextual structures? (Burbules and Berk 1999) And in turn are the contextual structures of the critical pedagogy possible to deal with without looking at the concepts and terms that are constructed by them? Is it possible for the critical pedagogy to accept the criticality of students that

refuses to “find” the truth they are supposed to? And in turn is it possible to allow students to conclude with the structural frames in their search for the truth through critical thinking?

While critical thinking describes an approach on how to think critically through exercises and method, critical pedagogy seeks to make the students identify the overlying structures that shape their world (Burbules and Berk 1999). There seems almost to be a given answer to which the students must strive to discover. The direction sees issues in relation to a bigger structure, be it political, cultural or religious, and does as such create an expectation of a wanted answer from the students. This is a problem as the very nature of critical pedagogy is that of discovering indoctrinating discourses (Burbules and Berk 1999).

Both directions describe and explain how students should come closer to and discovering the truth. Herein lies a danger, namely that of influencing what the students see as the truth.

Critical thinking as mentioned above seeks to identify and analyse the concepts and terms of our everyday life, and has no clear political agenda (Burbules and Berk 1999). The issues in which students are trained to become critical thinkers are varied and there are no correct answers and no correct truths to be found. The connection between these issues is not, contrary to critical pedagogy, not at the heart of the analysis. Impartiality and objectivity as far as possible are key here. Critical thinking has however been criticized for not being aware of the biases and the societal influence on their so called impartiality and objectivity. Critics go on saying that such influence entails a furthering of already accepted and conventional norms in the society.

### **1.2.7 How to measure critical thinking**

To measure whether or not the students did acquire an attitude of critical outlook and broad understanding as a result of the study, they were asked to recall their initial thoughts on a set of different central topics of the programme, when entering the CIE programme, and compare them to their present opinions on the same topics. With that said, changes and development in the student’s perceptions and attitudes on different subjects can not be seen as a litmus test for checking if they have acquired a critical outlook, or as discussed above, the necessary tools for critical thinking. The student’s comments should however be seen in relation to, the syllabus, organization, theoretical framework and interdisciplinarity of the CIE programme in order to understand if the organizers provide an environment where

students are able to and further encouraged to think critically. In my findings this will be discussed in light of the students feedback through the in depth interviews.

### 1.3 Literature and related research

In writing this thesis it has been important to understand how the mechanisms of evaluation and student feedback can change already existing structures at faculty level. Hirschman and his book, *Exit Voice Loyalty* (1970) provide an interesting metaphor and conceptual framework in how consumer's feedback (voice) can impact their own situation, whether on the arena of work or education. According to Hirschman (1970) each consumer, here students, faces three different possibilities to impact their own situation; exit, leave the programme, voice – give direct feedback to the organizers of the programme, and loyalty, continue on the programme and hope that it will improve or change over time. Hirschman's theory has been used both in the introduction, in the concluding remarks in each chapter, and in the concluding chapter it self.

To gain insight and understanding of the concept critical thinking, Burbules and Berks article *Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits* (1999) has been of considerable use. So has Scriven's book *Reasoning* (1976) and Cynthia Blodgett-McDeavitt's article *Critical Thinking: A Positive Approach to Personal and Social Transformation* (1995).

In order to understand the theoretical basis on which the two specializations operate on I have found it useful to read Brock –Utne's *Whose education for all, the re-colonization of the African mind* (2006), and parts of Castells' *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Volume I: The Rise of the Network Society. Prologue: The net and the self* (1996). Both presenting different sides of how who holds the power in today's global village. In addition I have also tapped into Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1970) and Nyerere's *Education for self reliance* (1968). Placing the field comparative and international education into a larger framework and understanding how the global forces affect it has been difficult and at the same time crucial. I have tapped into a vast field of literature touching on globalization and education.

*Education, globalization and social change*, by Lauder, Hugh, Brown, Dillabough and Halsey (2006), was crucial in giving the thesis a good and broad basis from which it was easy to understand the context of the programme. So has Joseph Stiglitz': *Globalisering som virker* (2008). Andy Greens article: *Education and globalization in Europe and East Asia: convergent and divergent trends* (1999) and Cristoph Scherrers article on: *GATS: long term strategy for the commodification of education* (2005) has contextualised and given insights on globalization and internationalization of education today. Helene Bank's article: *Utdanning- en tjeneste for hvem?* (2005) has also been important in order to understand Norway's role and part of the GATS agreement.

In defining and discussing how to measure and how to view development, *Poverty and Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, (2000) by Allen and Thomas has been of great value, and so has *Den Innviklede utvikling* (1994) by Oddvar Smukkestad in presenting development theory and explaining of the term development and the content of it has changed and been affected over the years.

For methodological considerations, Bryman's *Social research methods* (2004), and Michael Quinn Patton's *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (2002), have been crucial in deciding and defining the methodological approach of this thesis.

To describe the intended learning outcomes of the programme, my point of departure was the programme's official web pages: <http://www.uio.no/studier/programme/ciedu-master/> as well as additional material graciously provided on my request by the head of administration.

Inspirational literature that I have used in order to understand how "othering" is a great danger in the comparative and international programme Edward Said's *Orientalism* (2003) and Ian Buruma & Avishai Margalit's, (2004) *Occidentalism – A Short History of Anti-Westernism*, has given me important insight in this. However not part of the discussion in the thesis itself, for me as a researcher it has been important understand and be conscious of my own biases when writing. In addition Foucault's: *Forelesninger om regjering og styringsmakt* (2000) has given useful insight in the concepts of power and discourse.

Of particular interest to my study was the Mphil CIE thesis written by Thereza Mtsewiga: *The value of the Mphil CIE to the students: a tracer study of the UIO (1998 – 2006) alumni*

*of Tanzania*”, in 2006. Comparing findings with her thesis, made it possible to look for trends and progression on a broader level. It furthermore raised my alertness with respect to research bias related to cultural and ethnic background, making it relevant to ask if a North/South divide could be detected both with respect to the questions asked and the answers given. Mtsewiga’s and my own explicit considerations of research bias will be presented in the chapter 4 Method.

Mtsewiga traced 22 Tanzanian graduate students from the CIE programme. Her focus was to appraise the usefulness and relevance of the education: How the students experienced the programme (fulfilment of expectations with respect to the quality of education and their social life in Norway). How the programme helped the students’ career (job opportunities, promotions and increased work competence). How the programme might have helped develop the Tanzanian society (the contribution of the CIE programme to solve problems at an organizational and societal level)

When compared with my research questions interesting differences indicating research bias can be detected. Though we both are engaged in assessing the quality of the programme and the students’ learning outcome, her focus is on the *students* level satisfaction with the content and practical outcome of the programme, while my point of departure is to examine if/how/to which extent the programme meets *its own requirements* with respect to learning outcome.

Furthermore, she has applied a broader approach to evaluate students’ satisfaction, including “how their social life has been in Norway, how well integrated they were in the unit of the CIE with fellow students and the Norwegians” (Mtsewiga 2006:7). Such considerations were considered to be extra curricular to my study and thus omitted from my questionnaire.

In her quest to assess the quality of the programme she also explored questions similar to mine: The relevance of the syllabus, the quality of teaching, the geographical focus of the specializations, recommendations for improvement of the programme, etc. Thus the similarities between our research projects are found in the operationalization of our main objectives, making a comparison of our findings both interesting and necessary. Mtsewiga’s findings and conclusions will be compared and discussed in chapter five on findings.



## 1.4 Scope and limitations

The scope of this thesis is to present and suggest ways in which the CIE master programme can cope with present challenges connected their educational aims. I will examine if and how the CIE master programme manages to live up to its own ambitions according to its educational aims. The thesis focuses on the cohort of 2006-2008, and has from that cohort drawn a sample of 13 students that have been interviewed. 3 staff members have also been interviewed in order to explore the background for the programme and its structure.

Although a larger study involving more staff members and more alumni classes would have made this study more thorough and more comparative, this has not been possible due to time limitations. It would also been proven difficult to retrace all former students and conduct interviews with them. This also limits the possibility for drawing generalizations from the findings. That being said, it is important to consider the student voices in this thesis properly and take advice and comments seriously.

During the research process new developments in the programme have occurred as the two main professors have been replaced. These developments have been difficult to follow simultaneously as writing this thesis, but there is no doubt that the thesis will provide for a good point of departure for the new professors.

## 1.5 Method

I have chosen a qualitative research design, combining both in-depth interviews and a qualitative questionnaire. The interviews have been semi-structured and have been open ended, to allow the students to share and add reflections and questions. This has been done as I wanted to get detailed and precise information to build on. The qualitative questionnaire has aimed to detect changes in the student's attitudes and level of knowledge on different central themes in the two specializations.

The sample in this thesis has consisted of 13 students and 2 staff member and one former staff member. The students have been sampled from my own class; the cohort of 06. The students' voices are the main perspective in this thesis. It is the learning outcome as experienced by the students, which will be used as my criteria for analysing and evaluating

the success of the instructional objectives. The three staff members were interviewed after I had finished the student interviews, enabling me to present them with findings and feedbacks from the students.

Personal biases and how they affect research has been a matter of great consideration, and I have used Patton's (2002) triangulated reflexivity to understand not only how my own biases but also the other parties' biases have affected it. Cross cultural interviewing and cultural sensitivity has also been of key importance.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE GLOBAL CLASSROOM – A CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE CIE PROGRAMME

“Interaction between different people is a crucial element in any learning process. Development of knowledge is human interaction, and also interaction between borders. International collaboration provides a comparative perspective, giving new dimensions to knowledge transfer and education”.

(Roger Pedersen Political Adviser, Ministry of Education and Research, Norway, my translation)<sup>5</sup>

#### 2.1 Conceptual framework

The importance of definitions and their potentiality as markers of cultural gaps has been an underlying experience and problematique throughout my research. Edward Said (2003) points out how a definition of others easily creates a “we” and “they” tendency in which similarities and common grounds are sacrificed for the benefit of power, legitimized on differences.

Discourse, globalization, development and power are high frequency concepts in any research concerned with comparative and international education. High frequency does not necessarily correlate with high level of precision, thus a conceptual framework defining what is understood by the concepts in this particular setting is required.

##### 2.1.1 Discourse

A discourse can be seen as a set of terms, which are implicit in our language and that everybody shares within a culture. Foucault (2000) looks at discourses in a sociological context and argues that a discourse can be thought of as an institutionalized way of thinking. There is a connection between the forces in the society and the way they materialize in our language, in institutions, and in the individual. We can draw from Foucault’s definition of discourse that power relations are closely connected to how discourses are shaped, in that prevailing sets of terms will be expressed in “authoritative” sources in any given field.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kd/dep/politisk\\_ledelse/avskjedigete/Politisk-radgiver-Roger-Pedersen/taler\\_artikler/2006/Om-verdien-av-internasjonalisering.html?id=445064](http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kd/dep/politisk_ledelse/avskjedigete/Politisk-radgiver-Roger-Pedersen/taler_artikler/2006/Om-verdien-av-internasjonalisering.html?id=445064)

However Foucault (2000) has a particular view of power structures as fundamentally oppressive. That in itself is a view that could be challenged as a generalization across fields and wider societal contexts. How we talk about issues that concern us affect the way we deal with and solve them.

Various discourses have been identified with the study of Edward Said's *Orientalism* from 1978 and Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit's *Occidentalism – A Short History of Anti-Westernism*, (2004) as two of the more influential. Discourses change with time, some reoccur, some disappear, and some merge to form a new discourse.

Throughout history various geographical areas have been localized on a developmental axis between barbarism and civilization; Goths versus Romans, Muslims versus Christians, Asia versus Europe. During the Cold War (1945-1989) the world was divided between the capitalist West and the communist East, leaving out those countries that were not aligned with the political conflict. To describe the latter group of countries, French demographer Alfred Sauvy, in 1952 coined the concept of the Third World (*L'Observateur*, August 14, 1952). It furthermore had references to the "Third estate" the commoners of France during the French revolution. Thus the concept gained connotations of poverty and exploitation and eventually became politically difficult to use.

In 1970's the German Chancellor Willy Brandt introduced and implemented its replacement; the North-South Divide in his Brandt commission for development.<sup>6</sup> Thérien (1999) explains that the North/South divide is problematic as countries of the South forms thin layers of society that is fully integrated in the economic North, and that North has develops internal layers much alike the South. Although such a division of the world has been powerful and useful in world politics for over 20 years, Thérien (1999) argues that it has lost its meaning. It is how poverty is defined in connection to globalization that now defines the developed and developing world. He identifies two paradigms. The Bretton Woods paradigm and the UN paradigm. These two paradigms differ in many aspects, especially on globalization. The Bretton Woods paradigm finds that the processes of globalization leads to progress and integration, whilst the UN paradigm sees that it leads to a splintering and that it is a multiplier of inequalities. Such paradigms hold immense power and do, as Thérien (1999)

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.brandt21forum.info/About\\_BrandtCommission.htm](http://www.brandt21forum.info/About_BrandtCommission.htm)

explains, set the agenda for development and international discussions on issues like trade and aid. It is however beyond the scope of this paper to further investigate these paradigms and the consequences that a shift of terms describing world inequality has caused.

### **2.1.2 Globalization**

Two main theories on globalization can be distinguished; one holds that the processes of globalization make the world more homogenous while the other claims the exact opposite. Friedman (2005 in Stiglitz 2008), in his book *The World is Flat*, argues that the processes of globalization flatten the political, economic and cultural landscape of the world. Globalization is providing opportunities to compete on increasingly equal terms. Already in 1996 Castells claimed that the main division in this competition is between capitalist forces and individuals on the local level (Castells 1996). The divide between losers and winners should not be put in a geographical framework of North and South, but rather in the framework of access to information and economic power. But there are still quite clear winners and losers.

“Power and wealth are determined not by the industrial production of goods but by access to information. In the information city the global moulds the local and electronic flows shape the economy through relations between units that are far away from each other in terms of space. Identity politics therefore can not be explained in terms of a civilization struggle between the West and the rest of the world, but as an expression of local resistance to the global flows of capital, technology, images and information.” (Borja and Castells, in Allen and Thomas 2000:502).

Castells’ theories clearly divide the world in the market powers of economic globalization, and the individuals that are affected by it. In doing that the opposing party is not placed into a geographical frame, thus saying that the forces of economic globalization affects people both in the North and South.

At the other end of the debate is the argument that the processes of globalization reinforce the already existing political and cultural differences, creating a more heterogeneous world. According to Grugel (2002), the global economic system is closely linked to the reinforcement of the West’s hegemony. Through large multinational institutions such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund some of the world’s most powerful institutions are in reality guarding the interests of the West.

Economic globalization being the most powerful of the globalization processes, it is also the one causing the biggest and most rapid changes in people's day to day life (Stiglitz 2008). Many countries are today dependent on aid, and emergency relief and are thus at the mercy of big economic institutions. Aid and development discourse that change and restructures its course also have immense effects on countries in the South and mirrors a continued power imbalance between the North and the South. Grim examples of ineffective aid and high interest rates on loans from the WB and the IMF are also important aspects of this power imbalance. Such are the arguments of the adherents to this definition of globalization.

In the CIE programme these two positions regarding globalization are mirrored in the organization of the programme into two specializations, specialization A, (Education and development), with a globalization sceptical Southern perspective, expressed by its lead professor as: "We also wanted them to learn what we in the West had been doing to the developing countries, to understand the influence the west had. But also what we were doing now. That it is a new type of colonialism." (TA). Specialization B, (Education, policy and planning), with a "globalization as a matter of fact" - Northern perspective. Expressed by its lead professor as *"The world is becoming more and more alike with globalization and I frankly don't see why such a perspective wouldn't benefit the course."* (TB)

One might say that these two views on globalization are not mutually exclusive seeing that a critical view on the North and a critical view on market forces are somewhat in accordance. It is problematic however in a discussion of reasons, consequences and possibilities of globalization.

### **2.1.3 Development**

What is development and how can it be measured?

"I had read a lot about developed and developing countries, you know the themes what it means to be developed and what it means to be developing, and I don't agree with the definitions that we in the West give other countries, from before I started the programme I didn't like stereotyping countries." (SA 13)

Development has a reference to evolution, as a biological process of change inevitably following the same pattern, towards the same goal. But development in a socio-economic

political sense should not be viewed as something to blue print, but as something that each country should handle in its own context. Historically capitalism and anti capitalist forces have been at the core of the development discourse (Allen and Thomas 2000). Either capitalism is defined as something creating an engine of growth with some room for intentional development to ameliorate the faults; or as a struggle between pro market and protectionist movements. Over time these categories have developed into a division between neo- liberalists and structuralists (Smukkestad 2000).

Looking at the contemporary development discourse we see that the main dispute is not so much between such opposing parties but rather on the issue of interventionism, a term describing north's role as a development promoter in the South (Allen and Thomas 2000). On whose terms is development being done?

Today the most common, and, perhaps, most criticized measure of development is to look at a country's Gross national product – GNP. The GNP entails the monetary value of all products and services that are produced in one year (Allen and Thomas 2000). One of the world largest financial institutions, The WB talks about Low Income Countries and Middle Income Countries to distinguish between the poorest and the not quite so poor. But that does not mean that the World Bank equates “development” with GNP per capita. GNP per capita has a special importance when there is a need to group countries as to their capacity to pay back loans, and whether there should be any interest charged on the capital borrowed, or merely a national service charge (Allen and Thomas 2000). The category of which the country falls under has immense consequences in relation to for instance aid.

An alternative way of measuring development is the Human Development Index, HDI, created and used by the UN (Allen and Thomas 2000). The HDI looks at factors like life expectancy, child mortality, and analphabetism in addition to the economic aspect, statistically intercorrelated.

In the CIE programme ‘development’ both as topic and concept is treated differently. Specialization A has a high level of focus on the topic, it being one of two defining terms for the specialization itself. But little time is spent on defining the concept or raising awareness of the concept as part of a greater discourse. In specialization B on the other hand

‘development’ is not at the centre of attention, economics of education and policy making are discussed without focusing on development as such.

#### **2.1.4 Power**

Power is, according to Foucault, a term in constant flux, and he emphasizes the importance of recognizing our historic past in order to understand our present. In the CIE programme such an understanding of the issues on our reading list is evident in its lacking. Development theory and pedagogic theories has been presented to the class very briefly, leaving the students to wonder whether or not a more complex backdrop to the field exists.

In our classroom discussions the past has often times been as present as the present itself. Old colonial history and continued abuse of power from large financial institutions as well as donors, has been a cause of heated debate and at times anger and frustration. These situations might have been easier to deal with and easier to understand had we as students had a more comprehensive understanding of where and how the field of international and comparative education fits in the global village we live in.

“They really try in this programme to stress the other view, which is good but I’m not sure that they pulled it off. They really try to make an effort to negate the whole, you know, there’s this is a class that is being taught in Norway, but they try to make an effort to not teach from the viewpoint of the West, which is a good thing...” (SB 15)

#### **2.1.5 Globalization and education**

*“We have very different political views; one embraces market liberalism and the use of English as language of instruction, whilst the other disagrees strongly with market liberalism, and advocates a more culture sensitive approach to language of instruction.”(TA)*

As we saw in the conceptual framework above, each of the specializations adhere to different views on globalization. We noted that specialization A Education and development seemed to have a rather globalization sceptical outlook, while specialization B Education planning and policy, had a more “matter of fact” approach to the issue.



One critically important issue to address when discussing education in the era of globalization is whether or not national power is eroding or remaining as strong as it has been. Many argue that the power of nations is eroding as a result of globalization, and that supranational level of decision making is replacing the national level on areas like trade, health, and education. Andy Green in his article: *Education and globalization in Europe and East Asia: convergent and divergent trends*, (1999) represent a view in which the nation state still holds the main decision power. Green explains globalization and its effect on the power of the nation state to be overrated. Further he says that globalization theory's prediction of a borderless world, as a consequence of international communication, is unconvincing. He holds that "there is very little evidence across the globe that nation states are losing control over their education system or ceasing to press them into service for national and economic and social needs." (Green 1999: 56) What is happening on the educational arena is an increasing degree of convergence, he emphasises however that this does not decrease national power. Such convergence must be seen as an affect of internationalization.

Scherrer (2005) on the other hand holds an opposing view, pointing to the General Agreement on Trade in Services, GATS, under the WTO, which regulates education as a service. In signing such an agreement, Scherrer (2005) argues that the nations' chance to control their own educational sector has decreased. "It can be seen as a kind of new constitutionalism because the rights of the governments versus a property holder are circumscribed and can not easily be changed" (Scherrer 2005). Thus a democratic choice in matters such as education is no longer in place. Education has become an arena of trade and this new economic starting point and the commoditisation of the sector has immense consequences (Scherrer 2005). We see that the two authors hold different views on how globalization effects education, although the two only comment on the mere externalities of the processes of globalization. It also has an impact on the content of education and on the how to define the term in itself.

The aim and nature of education is being questioned as a result of globalization. Kenway and Bullen (in Lauder et.al 2006) have argued that economic globalization and the information revolution have caused a radical change in the very nature of the learning process. "A commoditization of education promotes an uncoupling of learning from its traditional institutional locations" (Kenway and Bullen in Lauder et.al 2006). They argue that the

purpose and aim of education is directed away from its previous goal of creating national identity.

But there is also a loss to this release, as indigenous knowledge and practices, by many educationalists seen as prerequisites in any learning process, are driven even further out of the educational policies. On the one hand one can look at education as a common good and a right that everybody should enjoy. That it is something that enables people to fulfil their potential Amartya Sen and Vandana Shiva were important contributors to an alternative view of development (Benjaminsen and Svarstad 2002). Sen's capability theory is strongly connected to education as means of development. He sees that economic growth and industrialization has not benefited all, and could therefore not be seen as development. Development has to be seen as a means not an end, and poverty as such is too narrowly defined (Benjaminsen and Svarstad 2002). Development must be defined as the human's expansion of freedom to realize their values; poverty indicates that realization is not possible. Therefore development cannot only be economic. Education helps people to see their own potential and is therefore crucial for development (Benjaminsen and Svarstad 2002).

To equal development with economic growth has been common since the 1950-ties, and can be seen as a result of the economists influence on general modernization theory in which economic growth was among the most significant denominators in measuring a country's level of modernity (Smukkestad 2000). The great advantage of this standard is its practicality; but its scope is of limited use if development is understood as improvement in general living conditions for a country's population (Allen and Thomas 2000). When immaterial goods such as democratization, equality and education are brought to bear on the standard of measuring development, GDP is of little to no use.

Globalization has also led to trans- national exchanges of curricula, and policies. Education is to a large extent treated as a commodity on an international market (Scherrer 2005). It is a service that can be bought and sold. Human capital theory is an example of how education is seen as an incentive to growth (Becker)<sup>7</sup>. The theory, with roots to economist Adam Smith, identifies several types of capital, amongst them schooling. Thus schooling is seen as an

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/HumanCapital.html>

input that will generate an output, here measured by the student's salary after graduating (Becker)<sup>8</sup>.

The World Bank also adheres to the human capital theory and looks at the rate of return in education and salaries in developing countries as an analytical tool in prioritizing education. They sketch out a chain where education creates human capital which again leads to productivity which leads to wages which leads to welfare (Jimenez and Moock 1998)<sup>9</sup>. It is easy to place this theory into the economic mode of thinking that economic growth equals development, which the World Bank holds. Or as stated by the head professor of specialization B: "*Nobody can avoid dealing with human capital theory in an international format. Globalization is everywhere*" (TB).

In specialization B, (education policy planning and policy), Castells is one of the basic theorists on the curriculum. Subscribing to Castells' theory (1996) it is made clear that there is no struggle between the North and the South but rather between capitalist forces and individuals on the local level. Here the opposing powers are the market forces of economic globalization and the people who are affected by them (Castells 1996).

In specialization A, on the other hand, we find the theoretical foundations from Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and Nyerere's *Education for Self Reliance* (1986). In short Freire (1970) advocates a pedagogy that promotes knowledge as the prime vehicle for liberation from oppressors, being economic super powers, institutions or governments. His criticism of "banking" in education, meaning a top down approach and the lack of student's ability to affect the teaching is lacking, is key. Dialogue and mutual knowledge sharing is the answer to convert education into an empowering experience.

Along some of the same lines we find Nyerere's education for self reliance (1986), arguing that education with the aim of rebuilding a national identity is key in the process of a nation's development. In order for this to succeed it is important that educational policies and practices are based on that nation's traditions and languages. Only then can independence from the West be realized (Nyerere 1986).

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/HumanCapital.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-109907987>

Adhering to Freire and Nyerere's theories a clearer picture of a North and a South is formed. Here old colonial history, independence and empowerment of the poor are important issues. Adhering to these theories it is common to emphasize what effect such a focus has on widening the gap between North and South. By pressuring countries into a more economic mode of thinking on the educational arena, the opportunity of education disappears for many in the South. Many families cannot afford primary schooling let alone University fees. The arena of global education has thus reinforced established winners and losers. In order to reverse this effect it is crucial to redefine education as a general good which everybody can access, a human right. Governments and educationalists should aim to resolve how education can be a constructive force in democratization.

## 2.2 Concluding remarks

We have in this chapter outlined the major differences in theoretical outlook between the two specializations within the CIE programme. In an interdisciplinary field such as comparative and international education, many different academic disciplines contribute and shape it. The way in which academics from these disciplines view the world, and how they define the forces at play in it becomes crucial in the defining the field itself. Empirical evidence can not be explained without a general definition of the power division in the world. This is of course natural and what more necessary in order to discuss and *evaluate research*. With two professors that holding very different views of the world, and in turn the place of education, it was challenging to develop a common platform for the educational praxis. These differences have proven to be a continued challenge, and some might say even a problem in order for the student to understand and learn what the field of comparative and international education is. And yet it was the same two professors' which made the establishment of the CIE programme possible, by their competence and professional ambitions. In the following chapter we shall examine the history of the programme in more detail.

Now if we turn to the metaphor of a customer-company relationship as described by Hirschman (1970), how would this situation fit? Well as a customer it would be a confusing experience to do business with a company equipped with two competitive managing directors holding parallel positions within the business hierarchy, selling two completely different goods, each claiming to give the best offer. Not the easiest way to build customer loyalty.

## CHAPTER 3

### A SHORT HISTORY OF THE PROGRAMME

#### 3.1 Internationalization – National and regional efforts

In order to understand how internationalization affects education we must understand what the concept entails. Tjomsland (2004) differs between an old and a new description of internationalization of education. In her old definition of the term, she argues that internationalization was built on voluntarism, and that it consisted of the international contact between teachers, students, universities and states. Internationalization is no longer a description of voluntary contact between researchers, students, universities and states, processes initiated by the individual person, institution, and researchers. The new internationalization is one where this voluntarism is institutionalized and where the educational goal is standardization (Tjomsland 2004).

It has become institutionalized through formal agreements of cooperation and exchange of staff and students facilitated by an increased use of English both in syllabus and scientific productions (Tjomsland 2004). Norway endorsed the Bologna declaration in 1999, to reform higher education systems in order to create overall convergence at European level. The national accommodation to international rules trickled down on the individual educational institution.

##### **3.1.1 The University of Oslo and internationalization**

With the Quality reform launched by the Ministry of Education in 2004, a political agenda on internationalization of higher education in Norway was operationalized (Tjomsland 2004). Standardization of systems and activities that prior to the reform had been based on voluntarism meant that universities were forced to make sweeping changes. According to the main aim of the reform's platform, it is to put Norway in the forefront on higher education (Tjomsland 2004). It further states that a replacement of old national characteristics should be replaced with international standards and regulations. The introduction of BA and MA

degrees was an important part of such standardization<sup>10</sup>. The reform can be seen as a nationalization of international educational trends.

For the University of Oslo, UIO, and other big universities in Norway, the reform meant an increase in international activity, and a conflict between academic and administrative logics became a challenge in the different institutions (Tjomsland (2004)). She identifies that there are several motivations for implementing and raising the level of internationalization. In the case of the University of Oslo, one important factor was to protect their position as the most prominent institution of higher education in Norway. Another important factor that comes into play is what the ripple effects of internationalization will be (Tjomsland 2004).

One of the strategies applied by the University of Oslo was to increase its cooperation with partners in the South. Their North/South cooperation is built on mutual work to succeed in reinforcing institutions and enforce competency in both the North and the South<sup>11</sup>. Research is a big part of such international cooperation, and is an important focus.

### **3.1.2 Academic and practical preconditions**

As part of a European and national internationalization strategy on higher education, the comparative and international education, CIE, masters programme, came into existence in 1998 (Programme presentation). The administration of the Faculty wanted to be part of the international strategy of the university, and their wish coincided with the academic motivation and international experience of professors Arild Tjeldvoll and Birgit Brock-Utne. At the time, Dean Lise Vislie, was the driving force behind the programme (interviews with Brock-Utne and Tjellvold, 2008).

The programme was designed by comparing and looking at other comparative and international education master programmes, and thereby setting the basic framework of the CIE programme (interviews with Brock-Utne and Tjellvold, 2008). The approach of the programme is interdisciplinary and emphasises the acquisition of a broad understanding of educational institutions, systems and their programmes/curricula, stressing an understanding of the cultural, socio-economic, technological and political aspects of educational

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<sup>10</sup><http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kd/Ryddemappe/kd/norsk/tema/utdanning/hoyereutdanning/tema/kvalitetsreformen/Kvalitetsreformen-i-lys-av-Bologna-prosessen.html?id=415728>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.uio.no/forskning/internasjonalt/>

development and change<sup>12</sup>. The role of research and innovation in educational development is emphasised, as well as the acquisition of planning, management and evaluation skills to be applied within national, regional, and international contexts<sup>13</sup>.

This somewhat instrumental approach to the programme was in other words the main concern as it was important to get it started as soon as possible and to get funding for it. NORAD and the state owned Students Lending Fund were the main contributors (Mtsewiga 2006). This also had an effect on who was accepted into the course. The acceptance of international students from Africa followed a pattern of where the largest Norwegian aid donors were made. The course was put together by quota students, scholarship students and self financed students (Mtsewiga 2006)

### **3.1.3 The structure of the programme**

The structure of the programme has more or less been the same since its beginning. The programme is divided into three main bulks<sup>14</sup>. The first, being the introductory courses, the second the field work and the third the thesis writing. After the first semester the students have to choose which specialization they want to pursue and go in dept in. Specialization A: Education and development and B: Education Policy and Planning<sup>15</sup>. The division in the second semester has been mentioned as problematic by the students, and has been one of the reoccurring issues in my interviews, and according to the staff interviewed it has been a continuous issue of debate on the programme since its beginning in 1998. I will come back to this issue in my chapter on findings.

### **3.1.4 Admission requirements**

The programme is interdisciplinary and designed to provide post-graduate training for academics of different backgrounds: social scientists, humanity scholars and natural scientist<sup>16</sup>. Admission requirements for entering the CIE programme has not changed since it started. As it is written on the programme's WebPages:

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.uio.no/studier/programme/ciedu-master/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.uio.no/studier/programme/ciedu-master/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.uio.no/studier/programme/ciedu-master/om/kort-om-programmemet.xml>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.uio.no/studier/programme/ciedu-master/om/kort-om-programmemet.xml>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.uio.no/studier/programme/ciedu-master/om/hva-laerer-du.xml>

- Either a foreign university degree based on no less than 3 years of study beyond Norwegian matriculation level, or a Norwegian cand.mag degree or equivalent Norwegian educational qualifications approved by the Faculty.
- Knowledge of English. Students from non- English speaking countries are required to have passed one of the following tests: TOEFL test with at least 550 points, IELTS test with at least 6.0 points.

The first group of students enrolling in the CIE programme in 1998 consisted mostly of students from developing countries and only a few Nordic students (interviews with Brock-Utne and Tjellvold 2008). This has developed over time, consistently with the funding opportunities of the programme, and since 2000 more students from Latin America and Asia entered.

In the following years more Norwegian students entered the programme as well, as it became more known and accessible through the faculty's web pages (interviews with Brock-Utne and Tjellvold 2008). This mix between Norwegian and international students is a beneficial starting point but is at the same time a challenge to the course, as I will come back to in a later chapter.

### **3.1.5 Intended learning outcomes**

The presentation of the master programme in Comparative and International Education (CIE) states that:

“The approach of the programme is interdisciplinary and emphasises the acquisition of a broad understanding of and a critical outlook on educational institutions, systems and their programmes and curricula, stressing an understanding of the political, cultural, socio-economic and technological aspects of educational development and change. (...) Participants will be trained in solving complex issues within a wide range of theoretical frameworks and provided with a variety of methodological tools. The degree will “prepare the student to be capable of critically assessing and evaluating educational practice, policies and initiatives taken in a wide variety of social and educational settings”.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.uio.no/studier/programme/ciedu-master/om/hva-laerer-du.xml>



The intention of the programme is also to make the students develop a deeper insight through writing an academic thesis. In addition to providing students with a broad understanding of the field, the programme also requires students from the second semester to concentrate their course work on one of the two areas of specialization offered<sup>18</sup>.

### 3.2 Concluding remarks

In this chapter we have seen how the CIE programme came into being in 1998, as a result of increased emphasis on internationalization within Norwegian higher education. The programme has been viewed as an example of national accommodation to international rules as they trickled down on the individual educational institution. With the Bologna declaration and the Quality reform launched by the Ministry of Education in 2004, the political agenda for the University of Oslo's internationalization strategy was put. North/South cooperation was an important mean to fulfil these aims. And yet the programme relied on the competence and commitment of two individual professors, professors that held quite contrary views on major topics within the programme.

How has this affected the students' experienced learning outcome from the study? In the next chapter, the methodological considerations prior to performing the actual in-depth interviews that will answer this question will be outlined.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.uio.no/studier/programme/ciedu-master/om/hva-laerer-du.xml>

## **Chapter 4**

### **Methods**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I will present the methods that I have used in my thesis as well as some of the challenges I have encountered. To exemplify methodological benefits and challenges I will use examples from the conducted interviews.

In this thesis I have been interested in discovering if and how the first year of the master programme in comparative and international education fulfils the ambitious approach stated in the programme's description of learning outcomes. I have chosen to do a case study design using the class of 06-08 in the CIE programme as my case. I have been interested in the complexity of the programme as well as the student's experiences with it. Bryman (2004) explains that case studies are meant to explain and explore the uniqueness of the chosen case.

I chose a qualitative method quite early in the process. I wanted to use one-to-one interviews to get in-dept information and to have the opportunity of asking more in depth questions. One of the main benefits of qualitative method is the possibility to go in to the field without any limitations of predetermined categories (Patton 2002). On the other hand this makes it more difficult to process and analyze the information you get from your interviewees. The process of interpretation is longer and will in many cases cause the validity to be weaker because of the researcher's influence on the process (Patton 2002).

In quantitative methods it is easier to see clear patterns and systems in the interviewee's answers; and it is easier to generalize your findings, although this also depends on the size of your sample. This also makes it easier to compare quantitative research, whereas qualitative research gives the researcher much information and detail without the possibility of drawing any clear generalizations from them (Patton 2002).

It is for example quite easy to see that the case study in this thesis is unique. Had I talked and interviewed another class of the CIE programme, I might have gotten quite different responses and possibly a different thesis all together. The combination of women, male, number of students from developed and developing countries, number of Norwegian students, the teaching situation at the faculty at the time, and a lot of interpersonal relations

have affected and shaped my thesis and my findings. All these variables might have been different and affected the thesis in another way at a different point in time. This makes it difficult to both generalize and to test the research after it has been done. With a comparison between the different cohorts it might have been easier to say something about important issues and trends that have reoccurred many years in a row. As mentioned above I will however use Mtsewiga's thesis on the CIE programme in order to compare and contrast my own findings.

This is a weakness in the design, but it has none the less been important to investigate the responses from the class of 2006 in order to get a picture of how the students perceive their learning outcome with respect to developing "critical outlook" and a "broad understanding" of the field. As there was no similar study that had been done, this thesis is purely inductive in that it rests upon the findings to create and shape explanations (and if possible, theory) as its end result.

When conducting the research, and in my case the interviews, it has become clear that the validity of my research has rested almost solely on my competence as a researcher and to a much smaller degree on the design of the interview guide and the questionnaire. In quantitative research on the other hand the researcher is not so much the tool, but the validity depends on the instrument of measurement. As both Patton (2002) and Bryman (2004) mention, it is considered a benefit to use a mixed method. Since I shall use a qualitative interview guide and a qualitative questionnaire, one might say that the thesis to a small extent has followed that advice. In the second part of the questionnaire I have been able to quantify the student's answers, but my sample is far from large enough to make any form of generalization. These answers have been coded and used in creating tables that will be presented later, in my chapter on findings.

## 4.2 Personal biases

*"You don't have to be a woman to interview a woman and you don't have to be a wrestler to interview wrestlers. But if you are going to cross social gaps and go where you are ignorant, you have to recognize and deal with cultural barriers to communication. And you have to accept that how you are seen by the person being interviewed will affect what is said."*

| Patton 2002: 392

No fieldwork or observations can ever be totally freed from the ideas and thoughts of the researcher (Patton 2002). Objectivity being out of range, consciousness about own biases becomes the second best. The biases are influential in relation to selection of topics, formulation of questions, in relation to how these questions are perceived by the interviewees, and finally how their answers are analyzed by me. Every interviewer must be aware of her own biases.

During the interviews I have thought of my biases as a rucksack that I always carry around. Although I would never intentionally open the lid of my rucksack and let my biases out, they affect the interviewee, me as a researcher and the atmosphere just by being in the room. This has been the case in some interviews more than others, but it has been difficult to know which of my biases that has affected my interviewees the most. This has at times left me frustrated and at times angry after some interviews.

The following short list of characteristics constitutes the main source of bias in my research; female, Norwegian citizen, atheist, left radical, idealist, tolerant, curious, positive, patient. Markers of individual rather than group identity are obvious in this list, itself being a bias related to my own cultural background in which the common identity is that of individualism. Being from a developed country places me among the privileged few. The privileges that I have experienced and keep experiencing every day is a very different point of departure from the majority of the interviewees. To them I might have seemed spoiled, rich or both, and the interviewees have often had a set of perceptions and associations connected to Western culture which has influenced the interview situation.

It has been clear on occasions that it is difficult for the students from developing countries to discuss development in a manner which does not carry some degree of defensiveness. This might have influenced their answers and to some extent my behaviour in the interview, as I have become unsure about how to react to such defensiveness.

At the start of the interview round I expected my age and gender to be an obvious obstacle, this assumption was to a large degree a result of my own prejudices. Although both my age and gender did to some degree affect how the students took me seriously as a researcher, the two main biases that have influenced my interviews the most have been my political views and the fact that I am a classmate of the interviewees

Having gone to class with the majority of the interviewees they were all well aware of my radical leftist political views. Baring this in mind the interviewees might have adjusted their answers in the direction of my political beliefs or to the contrary of them. For me as a researcher it has been a challenge to listen and to let the interviewees speak freely, as I at many points have disagreed strongly with them. As a very talkative person myself this has been a good and important experience and has taught me to listen more attentively to people around me in general.

I am an idealist as I think that although structures make up the main frameworks of how the world works, many “small” voices can change these large structures. This idealistic approach to life and the world around me can seem naïve and unrealistic, and it might have affected the degree of respect that the interviewees have towards me. In addition to being an idealist I am also a very tolerant person. Some see me as almost on the verge of being too relativistic, as I think that everybody holds different versions of the truth.

Being aware of one’s own biases could mean that one overcompensates. Maybe my eagerness to be objective and unbiased has led to more biases? By being too vague you can easily lose your own voice in the research. By being too relativistic and to understanding you might lose out on some very interesting discussions and important questions. You might also lose your initial thought behind the research, the reason why you decided to go ahead with that particular topic. Some respondents may feel that you are trying to be like them and that your understanding of them is superficial.

Patton (2002) also mentions that cultural codes such as what you wear and how you talk and act as an interviewer might influence the interview situation. This has not become evident to me during my interviews, but I have tried to wear neutral and appropriate clothes for the interviews in order to not offend anyone. I have acted in a more formal way than I usually do towards the students, as it has been important to act as an interviewer and not as a classmate. This might have been confusing to the students but I have found it necessary to distinguish between these two roles.

#### **4.2.1 Triangulated reflexivity**

During my thesis I have used Patton’s triangulated reflexivity as a tool to understand how my own, the interviewees and the audience’s (the professors that will read and assess my paper)

reflexive screens will affect the content of the thesis. It has also been a useful tool in always reminding me as a researcher of my own biases. When looking at Patton's triangle we see that culture, age, gender, class, social status, education, family, political praxis, language and values are placed in the middle of the triangle, working as reflexive screens between the three parties.

This means that the thesis is shaped and reshaped as these parties' reflexive screens meet. It is important to note however that these parties are not equal when it comes to the degree of influence on the thesis. The researcher is the most influential party and is the one who chooses what information to include and exclude to shape and direct the paper in its intended direction.

The researcher's influence on the interpretation of the interviews and the answers from the questionnaire is present and can if the researcher is not aware of his/hers biases overshadow the real outcome of the research. Therefore the researcher's self reflexivity is of great importance. Patton (2002) illustrated through his triangulated reflexivity how different screens affect and influence the research. His triangular model consisted of: Those studied/the participants, those receiving the study/the audience, and myself/the qualitative inquirer. Each group addressed with specific questions: how do the participants know what they know, what shapes and has shaped their world, how do they perceive the inquirer, how do I know, how do I perceive them? How does the audience make sense of what I give them, what perspectives do they bring to the findings I offer, how do they perceive me, how do I perceive them? At last but not least what do I the qualitative inquirer know, how do I know what I know, what shapes and has shaped my perspective, with what voice do I share my perspective, what do I know with what I have found?

The field in which all these positions meet is called a reflexive screen, which acts as a common modifier consisting of culture, age, gender, class, social status, political praxis, family, language, values and education.

Although the questions in general have not touched upon very private or sensitive topics, the very fact that students are asked to comment on the programme and offer recommendations may cause some to be more reserved in their answers than others. Thus the information is filtered and may not be as genuine as I would have liked it to be. There might be several

reasons why some of the students felt uneasy, or insecure about the interview and the interview questions.

First of all we have to consider what I have mentioned earlier namely that the roles between me and the interviewee have changed from classmate to interviewer. This may have caused some of the students to be unsure of how formally we were to interact, and to what extent they could talk freely. In addition the interview setting may have made some of them react differently towards me as they wanted to perform well and were sometimes (it seemed) nervous about not giving me the “right” answers. Some of them were also nervous about their English skills.

The students were asked to give comments on the structure, organization and content of the programme. This was uncomfortable for some, as it was not perceived as polite, and for some because they did not want to be held responsible for criticism of the programme in fear of sanctions from their home country.

What I have described above has possibly affected the validity of the answers and the information given through the interviews. This could have occurred despite of the anonymity promised by me, and that promise might have backfired as they might not have trusted me as much as I had thought they would. In addition to my own background and the biases lurking there, the cross cultural nature of the interview setting was a challenge in itself.

#### 4.3 Cross-cultural interviewing

It is important to recognize the challenges in cross-cultural interviewing. When interviewing, the language barrier may be a challenge, concerning the questions at hand, but also the values and norms connected to them (Patton 2002). What is appropriate to ask and what is considered more private? Respect and openness are crucial and must always form the basis for this kind of data collection. The interviewer must be responsive but at the same time not try to change the interviewee’s attitudes or opinions (Patton 2002).

As almost all the students have different national backgrounds, it has been important to consider what impact such a cross cultural setting has on the interviews. Only one of the students had English as her mother tongue, the remaining knew English as either their second

or third language. Using English in all of the interviews, including with the Norwegian students, I hoped that the language would work as a common ground of understanding at least verbally. But this assumption seemed faulty, and led to misunderstandings. I will exemplify this with some excerpts from some of my interviews.

**The interviewer:** I would like you to comment on the teaching we have had, how have you found it to be?

**Student:** it's, well there are fewer students here than I had imagined, but there are big groups here as well, it's different than what I had expected, it's nice (SB3).

The fact that one talk the same language does not mean that one understands each other, the intonation, and the words and concepts being used differed immensely from one student to another. The content of the concepts also varied from one student to another, and their academic background formed a very important frame of reference.

**The interviewer:** How do you think countries in the North act towards countries in the South?

**Student:** North? South? Hm, yes (SA1).

Sometimes the student's academic background collided with my human geography background, but in some cases it was closer to my background and made it easier to understand each other. Listening to some of the tapes in retrospect I can hear that questions have been misunderstood, but that I at the time of the interview am sure that we are on the same page concerning the content of the question.

**The interviewer:** when you entered the programme, what were your opinions on the relationship between the North (developed countries) and the South (developing countries)?

**Student:** you mean like a knowledge transfer from North to South? (SA1)

**The interviewer:** I meant more in regards of the political and economical relations between developing and developed countries.

**Student:** I think, you know, that you must see all these relations as one, now off course nobody is doing anything without purpose (SA1).



**The interviewer:** How have you found the organization of the teaching? We have had many different types of classroom teaching, everything from role play, discussions, to just normal classroom teaching?

**Student:** The organization in the classroom is OK (SB2).

**The interviewer:** mm

**Student:** I think it's not OK; it's OK (SB1).

My own command of English is imperfect and the level of knowledge of English of the interviewees varied. In spite of the fact that all the students and I communicated in English, there were issues of misunderstanding. It is difficult because many see it as embarrassing to admit to not understanding the question or the wording, and therefore do not dare to ask again for an explanation or a repetition of the questions. This weakens the reliability of the research. Because it is impossible to know if the students have answered your question or if they have misunderstood it and answered something else.

#### **4.4 Validity**

Ensuring the validity of the findings is closely related to the reflexive screens mentioned above. They all have an influence on the research. In qualitative research there are several different types of validity, I will however use external, internal and ecological validity. Internal validity is concerned with how correctly the research portrays what it is set out to portray (Brock-Utne 1996). External validity on the other hand looks at how the research findings may be used for generalization, and if they can be used to look at similar cases other places in the world.

Ecological validity is a second component of this external validity. It refers to the observed behaviour, and to what extent this behaviour can be generalized from one context to another (Brock-Utne 1996: 617). To ensure high ecological validity as many characteristics and details as possible of the research sample is necessary. When ensuring ecological validity the anonymity of the researched sample is almost impossible (Brock- Utne 1996). The researcher might be put in a position where the principal demands large alterations of the findings if he/she is to agree to it. The dilemma is whether to weaken the ecological validity in order to publish your findings. It is therefore of utmost importance that the researcher discusses this issue with his interviewees before conducting the research (Brock-Utne 1996)

## 4.5 Procedure

### 4.5.1 Sample

I decided to use my own class as the sample and to conduct the interviews in the final phase of the programme (3<sup>rd</sup> semester). To decide which students to interview I applied a random sampling. My only sample criteria was that the students were to have had a continuous study period at CIE for three semesters starting the autumn of 2006. All the students matching that one criterion were to be interviewed once and in depth. This did however prove too comprehensive and my final sample consisted of 13 students and 2 staff members and one former staff member.

By choosing my own class as the sample I strengthened the validity of my research project, gaining several advantages; common frames of reference, more experienced and reflected students, and already established trust between me and them. I was however facing the potential problem of being too closely related to the interviewees. By their having prior knowledge of me; of my political and academic opinions they might feel compelled to answer in a certain way, not want to participate, or be too casual in their answers. In other words it was important to consider my biases before starting the interview round.

By my using random sampling each student had the same probability of being a part of the sample (Bryman 2004). Another advantage is its representativeness regardless of sample size. Students from developing and developed countries participated, both men and women, and students belonging to the two specializations. The students were contacted via e-mail, phone or simply by asking them when we met.

## 4.6 Participant observation

Although the decision to write my thesis on a topic concerning my own master programme was made after the classroom based coursework had ended, one might say that I have been an active participant observer. I have been participating in the programme at the same level as the other students and have therefore shared the same lessons, syllabus and teaching as they have. I have followed the development specialization, and so I did not have the same insight in the everyday classes of the specialization B (education policy and planning). I have however found that looking at the syllabus, interviewing students and talking to Arild

Tjellvold, the main teacher of the policy and planning specialization, have given me a fairly good idea of the content and foci of this specialization as well.

In a more normal participant observation context the researcher has decided to be an observer from the beginning, either in an overt or covert manner, participating or non-participative (Bryman 2004). The researcher is eager to listen and to observe as much as possible from the setting he/she is in and may take notes or record parts of conversations. I however was not aware of my role as an observer until after the classroom teaching had ended and I started to work on my thesis. This gave me both advantages and disadvantages. The two main advantages were that the class and I operated on the same level; there was no distance between us with me being a researcher observing them. This makes my observations from the classroom more genuine and adds validity. Both the students' and the teacher's actions and expressions were genuine and honest, and not formed to be observed.

The second advantage was that the relationship between me and the other students was allowed to develop and that trust was created between me and them over time. A disadvantage with deciding the topic as late as I did, was that I might have gotten more out of the observations in the classroom. I would have been able to work more systematically and to record, take field notes and discuss with the students in a more results oriented way. Thus I might have lost important reactions and attitudes along the way. Another disadvantage was the closeness between me and the students which made the distinction between me as a researcher and them blurry and quite challenging as a basis for interpretation.

## 4.7 Field notes

During the process of writing the thesis I made continuous jotted notes both formal and informal. Bryman (2004) explains that jotted notes are fragments, associations or important words that are noted in order to remember important points, or to make notes of something for later inquiries. As Bryman (2004) makes a point of warning researchers from unreadable and non understandable field notes, I have been careful to make clear and relevant notes.

### 4.7.1 Formal notes

During the work on the thesis, from the first sketches of the proposal, to the design of the interview guide and the questionnaire and to the interviews, and the writing process itself, I

have been writing down thoughts and ideas. I have used a lot of time becoming certain about my focus – as many new and exiting ideas have developed a long the way. It has been important to keep my original research focus. The field notes have been a great help to me, both in order to be true to my original idea, but also in order to structure and make sense of the process in itself.

During the interviews/ questionnaire I have made notes of the interviewee's reactions to the different parts and to different questions. The main reason for this has been to detect difficult language and/or questions that were unnecessary or needed to be clarified. In addition I was interested in discovering the need for creating new questions that I just hadn't thought of.

#### **4.7.2 Informal notes**

During the process of writing the thesis I have also spoken to friends, colleagues, relatives and other external students about it. These conversations have made me think and rethink many parts of the thesis and have been a source of interesting input, new angles and interesting discussions. In none of the informal settings has my intention been to specifically get feedback on the thesis, but in a more general way to have an open discussion on the topic of my thesis and the challenges I have encountered. It has made me as a researcher more conscious and aware of what my research goals are and how to get there.

Pieces of discussions and interesting points that were made were written down returning home. Although there is a danger of forgetting or misinterpreting things that have been said the main purpose for me has been to write down new ideas emerging from those conversations, and not so much quote people.

### **4.8 Research Design**

I have chosen a qualitative research design, combining both in dept interviews and a qualitative questionnaire. As I wanted to know more about how each student's encounter with the programme and how it had affected them it was important to choose a qualitative research strategy. Qualitative research is inductive, thus theory is created from the research (Bryman 2004). The epistemological position is interpretative, and tries to understand and interpret the worlds of the interviewees.

By doing in-depth interviews with the students I wanted to get an insight in how they experienced the programme. Bryman, (2004) goes on to explain the ontological position of qualitative method as constructionist. This means that qualitative method implies that the world around us is being constructed and continuously reshaped by the social actors living in it. There is no separate world existing without the impact of the social actors.

## **4.9 Data collection methods**

I wanted to execute in depth interviews with all the students matching the sample criterion, and in addition have a self completion questionnaire that the student's were to answer before the interview started. I wanted to map how the student's attitudes and knowledge had changed in connection to the main subjects in the programme. Both the interview and the questionnaire were anonymous and the student's were assured that their answers would be treated with confidentiality. In order to formalize their anonymity they signed an interview consent form where they could mark to what extent they wanted their answers to be used in the paper. None of the students or staff members limited me in the use of their answers in the interviews or the questionnaire.

### **4.9.1 The questionnaire**

Designing both the questionnaire and the interview guide was a long process and much more complicated than I had imagined. Getting the questions right according to what I wanted to find out took a lot of time and the two forms were revised several times both before but also during the interview rounds.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts (not separated for the students) the first part consisted of personalia questions in addition to some questions concerning their academic background and how they first had heard about the CIE programme. All the questions in the first part were open ended. The advantage of posing open ended questions is that the students themselves can offer opinions or thoughts that the researcher didn't already think of (Bryman 2004). Hence new concepts and perspectives can come to light.

The fact that there are no suggestions of what the students should answer may also make the student more free to decide the wording and the content of their answer (Bryman 2004). The main disadvantage is that the student's answers will be more difficult to analyse. Each

answer has to be coded which takes a lot of time and is difficult as the student's answers may be very diverse and some even unclear. It is also more difficult to interpret the meaning of a question that doesn't have clear options.

In the second part of the questionnaire, the students were asked to circle, on scale from 1 to 4, to what degree they had present knowledge and previous knowledge about some of the main issues of the programme and within the two specializations. The main issues were designed from the reading lists of each specialization and had also been approved by the two main teachers at the time.

All the questions in the second half were closed ended. With closed ended questions it is easy for the student to answer, the fact that there are clear options enhances the possibility of comparing the answers. The student's answers will be easier to understand, and easier to categorize. As opposed to the open ended questions however it is clear that the possibility to associate and think freely when answering the questions is lost. With a chosen scale there would also have been the risk that the students see the options as overlapping or not covering the range well enough.

By looking at the student's questionnaire answers I was able to see if their attitudes towards the subjects had changed or stayed the same since the start of the programme and up on till now. A general challenge in concerning both open ended and closed ended questions is the fact that the meaning of the question(s), the researcher's intention, may be interpreted differently by the students, depending on their cultural and academic background.

#### **4.9.2 Semi structured interviews**

I executed semi structured interviews, and designed an interview guide to help me keep my focus. The semi -structured interview has the intention of getting the insights of the interviewees on specific issues. It always has a specific structure and a specific purpose (Bryman 2004). The interviewee is quite free as to how he/she wishes to respond to the question, and the interviewer is equally free to probe and ask new questions as new themes or issues arise as the interviewee's answers (Bryman 2004). I wanted to use the semi- structured interview because of the flexibility it offers the researcher and the interviewee. As the interviewees are asked to reflect upon how their attitudes have evolved, if they have changed or been challenged, it is important to have enough flexibility in the interview setting.

A set of questions concerning different parts of the programme were covered, and the same questions were asked to all students in more or less the same order. Although I wanted to get answers to the questions on my interview guide, I was open for new directions and adjustments of the questions along the way. Some of the questions were evaluative and some were more reflective. At the end of the interview each of the students got the chance to speak freely about things the interview might not have touched upon.

One of the greatest advantages of doing in depth interviews is the amount of detailed information you as a researcher get. The danger with these in depth interviews is, as mentioned earlier, the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewees. When the researcher knows the interviewee, there is greater risk of asking leading questions and to be less aware that one's own biases influence the research (Patton 2002).

In retrospect I see that I should have started to interview the students earlier on in my thesis work. The reason for why I didn't complete my interviews until January was that I didn't understand how much work it would be to transcribe them. Another reason was that I was in doubt concerning who to interview. My idea of interviewing all students and all administrative staff from 1998 (the beginning of the CIE master) to 2008, was impossible to fulfil because of time constraints and made me go back and rethink the sample, and as mentioned earlier this left with me with a sample of 13 students and 2 staff members and one former staff member.

As I started to interview it became clear that some of the questions could be left out and some of the questions needed to be more specific. I altered the interview guide after the two first interviews. Some issues that were taken up repeatedly by the students at the end of the interview were the timing and organization concerning the thesis advisors. This should perhaps have been one of my interview guide questions as it may have provided valuable information that would have been lost if they the interviewees hadn't mentioned it themselves. At the same time my open part at the end of the interview worked as it should, in that the information on this issue did come to my attention even so.

I have also seen that some of my questions regarding the programme have been too general; I should have asked the students more specifically about different courses and different

teachers to get more accurate information. This was clarified in the interviews but could have saved me a lot of time if it had been done beforehand.

One of the most serious mistakes in my interview guide was that I had some yes/no answers where I in reality wanted more information from the students. This didn't cause any problem however because most of the students were eager to give me additional information, but in one case this didn't happen, and I got much less information from the interviewee than what I had hoped for.

#### **4.9.3 Location**

All interviews were done in Oslo. In the beginning I didn't think about this as a factor in itself, but as the work and the interviews proceeded it became more important. This means that I as a researcher was in my home environment while most of the students were not. They were experiencing a whole new culture and were still adjusting to that, they were more uncertain than they would have been at home, and they felt more insecure as to the cultural norms and rules (formal and informal). This probably affected their answers and the interview setting and has made me think about how different the context for going into the programme really is for foreign students and local students.

Almost all the interviews were done on campus and some have been done in cafés. I decided early on that I wanted to use Blindern as the base for conducting the interviews. One important factor was that it was a location that was known to the students, but also because the possibility for good recordings was better there. The Blindern campus is also a middle ground between a formal and an informal setting, which suited me well.

#### **4.9.4 Recording**

I decided quite early that I wanted to tape record my interviews, and before conducting the actual interviews I rehearsed and got to know how the tape recorder worked. Most of the interviews took place in quiet rooms, which have made the quality of the recordings very good. At other locations where there was more noise, the recordings were also good, but it took me longer to transcribe. A clear advantage of recording the interviews was that the interviewee's views are easier to capture, it was clear what has been said when transcribing the interviews, and that all additional information, like the tone of voice and its connotation



were recorded as well. The main disadvantage with recording is that transcribing them is very time consuming.

#### **4.9.5 Transcription of interviews**

Transcribing the interviews is a process where I, the researcher, have to interpret the answers given to me. The recordings give me only the audio and not the visual impression of the interview (Kvale 1996). It is therefore useful and important to transcribe shortly after the interview so that the transcription does not become too de-contextualized. Kvale (1996) presses the importance of validity and reliability of the transcription. The researchers own biases will most probably affect his/hers interpretation of the transcription and hence it is important to be aware of these. Kvale (1996) suggests that to design a clear procedure of transcription it will be possible to enhance the reliability of the transcription. The validity of the transcription will rest on how well the oral language is transcribed into text (Kvale 1996).

The biggest challenge with transcribing the interviews has been the time that goes into it. It is extremely time-consuming and frustrating. One interview took around five hours to transcribe, others less all depending on the language and the flow in the conversation. After finishing my transcription I was left with a lot of paper and a lot of answers, and new questions. The transcription part was in the end worth while because it made me more aware and familiar with the contents of the interviews and I became more certain about analysing the material. This confidence also helped me in the process of comprising the interviews.

My biggest mistake concerning the transcription phase was time management, the transcriptions took much longer then I had imagined. This created a gap in time between the carrying out of interviews and their transcriptions. Therefore the “feeling” that I as a researcher had of the interview was lost and the interviews became less contextually understandable. I hope however that they did not become too de-contextualized as mentioned by Kvale (1996)

### **4.10 Analysis**

#### **4.10.1 Analyzing the interviews**

In analysing my interviews I have used meaning condensation as the main method of analysis. Meaning condensation is used to create a connection between the purpose of the

research project and the interviews (Kvale 1996). Kvale (1996) divides the method of meaning condensation in five stages. First the interviewer reads the whole interview, the interviewer decides the different units of meaning. Determining the unit of meaning is to divide the text, for instance a transcribed interview, into different units.

In my case it seems natural that these units of meanings are the answers to each question, but one can also see the point in dividing the answer to one question into several units of meaning as the answers can be quite long. Thirdly the researcher is to present what is the main theme of each units of meaning. In the fourth stage the meaning unit is interpreted in the light of the research purpose (Kvale 1996).

In the fifth stage the main themes that has been discovered is condensed and presented. The interviewee's answers are made into shorter and more condensed statements (Kvale 1996). I have been using meaning condensation on the transcribed interviews and broken the text up into a smaller and more condensed form. This made what the students were saying clearer and easier to understand, and in turn to detect any occurring patterns. As a researcher I had to be careful not to become too eager to make sense of the answers or to make them fit into a pattern, it was important to ensure that the real meaning wasn't lost or misinterpreted. It was important to stay true to the answers given even if they were not coherent or groundbreaking.

#### **4.11 Analyzing the questionnaire**

After some consideration I decided that the material from both parts of the qualitative questionnaire would not be used in the thesis. As the first part consists of information about the students that outline their background, this information has not been crucial in order to answer the main research questions. For the second part of the questionnaire however I have used coding. Bryman (2004) recognizes two main steps of coding; categorization and secondly numbering of the different categories. This method is particularly useful when open ended questions are to be analyzed, as they are often difficult to put into a clear cut system with rigid categories. It has been necessary to create a coding frame where all possible answers are numbered (Bryman 2004).

In this specific part of the questionnaire each theme that the students have had to consider has four different answering possibilities. These were already numbered in the questionnaire and hence easy to categorize. The main challenge here was to see how the different students have

responded to the past and the present knowledge question. Is there a clear change between these questions or is the level of knowledge and the content of it more or less the same as it was when they started? I have after grouping the student's answers, done a comparative analysis of them in order to see how their knowledge on the issues have progressed, or alternatively stagnated. Although the number of students is small, it has been interesting to visualize the answers in charts and compare them under each issue. The questionnaire and the interview will be included in the Appendices.

#### **4.12 Coding the respondents feedback**

In order to keep track and order of the students responses they have each been given a number f.ex 1, and one letter, S, (for student), a second letter stands for the specialization they belong to, hence A (development and education), and B (policy and planning in education). Then student number 1 would have the code 1SA/ 1SB. Staff has been given the letter T (for teacher) and a second letter signifying which specialization they belong. The former staff member has been coded with a T for teacher and both the letters A and B thus TAB.

This coding has been used throughout the thesis in both the analysis of the interviews and the questionnaire answers.

#### **4.13 Concluding remarks**

In this chapter I have explained and commented on my methodological considerations. Deciding on what kind of research method to use, and how to perform the research has in itself been quite challenging, but at the same time rewarding. As mentioned above staying true to my initial research questions has been a constant battle, as I have been confronted with new ideas and questions. I have found that although keeping the research on track can be seen as a goal in itself, so is staying open to new questions and answers a long the way Interviewing and analysing interview material has been a challenge and has thought me to become more aware of my own biases, and how they affect my research.

Although meticulously designed and tested, both the interview guide and the qualitative questionnaire has given me quite a few surprises, and the way to categorize and analyse my findings have been winding and long. The answers and comments from the students are

described in the next chapter and will give a more thorough description of different views and attitudes that came to the surface during my research.

By conducting this research I provided a voice possibility for the students in the CIE programme. The findings can contribute to a better understanding of “customers’ satisfaction” and thus enhance the programme’s ability to build loyalty and prevent exit from the study.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present and comment on my findings from the in-depth interviews with the students as well the findings from the questionnaire. The categorization of the findings from the in depth interviews is based on a selection of the four areas most relevant to my research questions, in which the respondents articulated the most substantial feedback: North-South perspective, organization of the programme, syllabus, and interdisciplinarity. From the questionnaire I have chosen two specific topics from each specialization addressed in the curriculum: from specialization A, development theory and aid, from specialization B, education and planning, and the economics of education. In the charts all the students' answers are conveyed totalling 13 answers. N= 13. It is once again important to emphasise that the findings in this thesis are not representative concerning all aspects of the whole CIE programme and its ten year long existence. They only describe and give insight in how the students from the 2006/2008 cohort experienced it to be.

#### 5.2 Acquiring a critical outlook

The approach of the programme is:

“interdisciplinary and emphasises the acquisition of a broad understanding of and a critical outlook on educational institutions, systems and their programmes and curricula, stressing an understanding of the political, cultural, socio-economic and technological aspects of educational development and change. (...) Participants will be trained in solving complex issues within a wide range of theoretical frameworks and provided with a variety of methodological tools.”<sup>19</sup>

In the introduction of this thesis a short description and discussion of both critical pedagogy and critical thinking was made. Critical thinking as an academic competency was described as: the performance of skilled and active interpretation and evaluation of observations and communications, information and argumentation (Burbules and Berk 1999). To be critical, thinking has to meet certain standards of clarity, relevance, and reasonableness (Fisher 2001). Critical thinking as such is important to have in mind while analyzing the findings.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.uio.no/studier/programme/ciedu-master/om/hva-laerer-du.xml>

Even though critical thinking has been most relevant critical pedagogy is also visible in the CIE programme. An interesting indication from the findings, further down, is that the majority of the students in Specialization A have experienced a tendency of critical pedagogy. Here the focus of theory has been on Nyerere (1986) and Freire (1970), and the role of education as a liberating tool. The need for identifying and revealing the power structures at work in the world and in how they in turn affect education has been an important factor in the curriculum. It is crucial to ask whether such a direction, is constructive in order to facilitate the possibility for the students to acquire a critical outlook. What consequences does such a direction have on the students learning outcome? To some degree it is important to acknowledge the need to see and to identify the overlying structures that affect education. There does however exist a need for scepticism towards a search for “politically correct” truths. Are the students being blinded by the intended goal of the curriculum and hindered to reveal their own truths?

Students in specialization B does however not respond in the same manner, they tend to indicate an education that is more identifiable towards critical thinking. The importance of questioning givens in our every day life, to question concepts and terms we use and identify ourselves through is core here. This is a somewhat more recommendable way of teaching as it allows the students to make their way to the truths on their own terms. It is however important to see that a lack of structural criticism is difficult to defend. Common for both directions of criticality is the need to liberate and empower students, but it is important to question that need in the given educational context.

As mentioned earlier the division between the two specialization and the professors in charge of them direct and influence the students learning outcome immensely. A more holistic view on criticality and other important issues that will be discussed below is recommendable. Once again it is worth mentioning that the goal should not be unification but a constructive merge between the two different pedagogical and theoretical world views.

To discover whether or not the students in the CIE programme have acquired a critical outlook on the themes and terms discussed in the curriculum, it has been important to track changes in attitudes on specific topics. These changes do however not serve as a litmus test

of identifying if the students have or have not acquired the skill of critical thinking, but indicates if the facilitators have given them a chance to do so.

Through questions concerning syllabus and organization I have sought to discover if the CIE programme is offering the students the necessary preconditions and tools in order to develop a critical outlook, as stated in the description of the programme.

The students were asked to recall their initial thoughts on the North/South divide when entering the CIE programme and compare them to their present opinions. Below I will present some of the selected respondents' answers to the two questions in some length because I want the students' voices to be heard.

“Before I entered the programme I had touched upon the globalization. People from the West actually wants to make the world a single village and that education should be similar you know, language should be English, French or whatever, so that it is all about what people think an we know about this back home (SA 2)

After:

...I don't think there has been a great change, it is the North that defines development and put pressure on the South, we don't define this for ourselves you see? It would have been better to have this programme in our natural settings.”

From this answer it seems that the student experiences the programme as a reinforcement of premeditated views: development is defined by the North and when explained and taught in an educational institution in the North, the possibility of achieving a broader understanding is impeded. Another student answered:

“I didn't have a clear opinion on North/South relations, but I had my own opinions on it, I guess from some thing that I had read and learnt from my experiences. During my teacher training I talked to a lot of NGOs and just did my own observations. I didn't have a negative picture of what was being done there. I think people who do development work have very good intentions (SA 8).

After:

... “Well I came in wondering if aid was done in a correct way, now I know it’s not. I think that development has been done wrong but I don’t think that all that has happened because of North, it’s not only the North that is doing bad things, people in the south are doing bad things as well. There are plenty, like Robert Mugabe and the likes of him, they are not innocent, and I think if you try to make it black or white that is a very dangerous thing to do. Painting the South as complete victims is not a very responsible thing to do” (SA 8).

“I think the programme conveys a polarized view of development, I think that’s what I got out of it, I don’t know if that was their intention, but hey are trying to victimize the South, and it is true no doubt that what happened with colonialism and later with a lot of these World Bank policies have been bad, but there is certainly a large part of people in the south that are not doing any good things either. I feel that the programme although touching up on the fact that such people exist was trying to say “bad North” and I just don’t see the point in doing that....” (SA 8).

This student experienced to become more critical during the study, but rather in spite of than because of the programme, leading her/him to conclude that she/he is more critical than the programme in matters of education and development.

“My opinion about North/South relations was connected to aid. I thought that aid was a good thing. And I still think that, I don’t think that donors are bad. Of course you can say that the World Bank and the IMF have done some terrible things but they also do some good things as well so it kind of balances it out. But of course they have done a lot of bad, but you can’t just look at that. I didn’t think of the North as bad and the South as good when I started, I saw it more nuanced then that (SA 11).

After:

... “My ideas and thoughts haven’t changed much. I think I had a good idea before I entered the class, but some new aspects have been added and some have disappeared so it’s not exactly the same but a lot of it is. I think you have to be critical when going to this master programme, because you don’t get a balanced view here, I think it is largely because some of us are so critical that we have been able to have a more balanced view in the end after all. If I hadn’t been critical I would have thought bad North and South is better” (SA 11).

Here the student openly says that she/he experienced the programme as something preventing the acquisition of a critical outlook, and that the only way to keep a balanced view on the topics was to be critical towards the programme itself. Another student commented that:



“I think my opinion on development and North/South relations were based on what I had seen and heard, and also from previous background in my country, my experience from my work... all my understanding of development relied on things that I had heard and seen, rather than knowledge in the field and how the world works, I didn’t know those things and that was why I wanted to study it” (SA 7).

After:

...They have changed... I have a problem now more than before with development aid and humanitarian aid and all these aid things... I have a difficulty with the message it creates, that somebody somewhere is having a pity on me.”

The student has experienced a change in attitude, depicted as a conflict between her/his actual experiences with aid (as something positive) and the views on aid presented by the Programme (as something negative).

“I had read a lot about developed and developing countries, you know the themes what it means to be developed and what it means to be developing, and I don’t agree with the definitions that we in the west give other countries, from before I started the programme I didn’t like stereotyping of the countries (SA13).

After:

... Not really, no it hasn’t, I had this very strong idea of mine when I entered the programme, because I think that there is a balance between North and South, in one way I have and in one way I have not, but I don’t think the West is only mean and bad and the South is hopeless and this is horrible and the West is so mean to us. I have never liked to see it that way, and I don’t agree with that because I think there is so much more than what we see. There’s so much politics and economy involved in it so it is very complex and it is not so easy as to look at the mean West against poor Africa. That is however the idea we have been introduced to in class” (SA 13).

“I have sometimes had the feeling that they are trying to convince us that the West is bad, but since I had this strong idea before going into the class I wasn’t challenged enough, because what I read wasn’t balanced enough. It wasn’t pro or cons all the articles were basically pro Africa, but if I had had the cons from the World Bank maybe it would have changed my mind, but it was just for one side so it actually made me stick more my original thought” (SA13).

This student has no experience of having a broader framework or more critical outlook as a result of the Programme. Quite the opposite, he/she emphasizes that in spite of the Programme's effort to "convince us that the West is bad", she/he has managed to keep her/his nuanced view on the matter.

"I had very strong opinions on global differences and the North and the South and I had been reading some literature on it so I had some very strong opinions about inequality, xenophobia, and racism and things like that. The difference (between North and South) is historically contingent, it has to do with history in part and exploitation, colonies and now in the post colonial era it has to do with the fact that everything happens on the premises of the West, they've got a head start in the global system, and yes they I think that modern capitalism is quite a big problem (SB 15).

After:

...I don't think it changed a lot. I have had my opinions more confirmed than challenged.

"The gap is there because of economic differences, and partly because some of the countries have been occupied by others, so therefore it has taken them a long time to develop and catch up with the developed countries. In my university we mostly talk about international cooperation. I think cooperation is much better than to fight with each other or discrimination or things like that. (SB 14)

After:

...someone's opinion is very hard to change I think not class experience or teaching will impact it, it has to be something bigger.

One of the interesting points to notice from their answers is that those admitting to not having had theoretical knowledge nevertheless had reflected opinions on the matter, generally seeing the North/South divide along lines of development, aid and globalization. Those referring to academic training / theoretical knowledge on the subject had more or less the same opinions as those without. Common to all respondents, all but one, is that none of them think that their view, opinions, understanding or attitudes towards the North/South divide were changed as a result of the study.

The respondents from specialization A, Education and Development, considering themselves to have an originally nuanced view on the North/South divide, did have their opinions

challenged by the programme as they felt that the programme had an agenda to define the North as bad. But thanks to their pre-programme critical outlook and broad understanding they managed to maintain this attitude in spite of what they experienced to be the aim of the Programme. Those with an “anti-Northern pro-Southern” perspective got their views strengthened by the programme. The respondents from specialization B, Education, policy and planning, reported that their views had not been challenged nor changed.

To discuss and explain the gap between the programmes’s stated learning outcome and the students’ experienced learning outcome, it was necessary to perform a more thorough evaluation of the programme. This was done through in dept interviews with the students on topics such as the organization of the programme, the syllabus, and interdisciplinarity of it.

### 5.3 Organization of the programme

The organization of the programme has varied somewhat, but a division into two specializations has always been a part of it. In this chapter I will comment on how the students perceive this division, and how this division affects their over all understanding of the field comparative and international education.

In 2000 a student evaluation revealed that the students were dissatisfied with the early division into specializations in the first year. Thus the practise was changed and since 2001 all students are given a common introductory semester before choosing their specialization. And yet when asked in 2008 how they experienced this division many of the students responded in negative terms. The division was seen as resulting from a rivalry between the teachers:

“I think that there’s a rivalry that supersedes the good of having these two tracks. Sometimes I felt that like they were fighting about what they were teaching us students... I feel that it was a very polarized programme ...” (SA 8).

This was also commented on by another student that saw the two specializations as a conflict of interest:

“...The way the programme made a distinction between policy and planning and development, I didn’t like that. I didn’t see any logic... It seems to me that these structures lie on the lines of interest of the organizers rather than being an ideal way of organizing the system...” (SA 7).

Or the division was interpreted as a lack of structure, and as weakening the rationale of the programme as such:

“More structure, more organized teaching and more basics, they should have a clearer idea, and they should cooperate much more, because now it is a divided programme, they should have one voice and have one perspective, and present the programme as one whole thing. What kind of programme is this supposed to be? To me it appears to be two separate programmes” (SB 6).

As mentioned earlier, in chapter 1, the programme was established as a result of a Faculty administrative initiative to implement the strategy of internationalization at the University of Oslo. Based on the academic background and interest of two professors, the CIE programme was launched. The success or failure of the programme became very personnel sensitive; the two leading academics’ ability to cooperate and combine their academic skills became crucial for the programme.

But as both main professors had such different academic, political and personal views on what the programme should be, this has been and continues to be a problem for the programme as a whole but also for the students that complete their masters through the CIE programme. It was decided from the beginning that a division into two specializations was necessary for the cooperation to be viable.

When presented with the findings from the interviews both professors admitted to academic as well as personal differences of such a magnitude that a division into two specializations with separate responsibilities was crucial for the very existence of the programme. And yet these differences are experienced by the students as something affecting the learning environment and learning outcome in a negative way. Because in spite of severe differences in policy and theoretical outlook both specializations have the same overall learning outcome to achieve. To the students this is confusing; they become insecure with respect to which competence they are supposed to acquire which again leads to insecurity about their own competence as graduates from the programme.

This insecurity is very well mirrored in the students' feedback on the question:

If you were to explain what the CIE master programme was about would you find it easy to do so?

- “I can talk about it, but not for such a long time...” (SB 14)
- “That’s a good question. I’ve tried to explain it for other people a lot of times during the last one and a half years, and I think that the name of the programme doesn’t really tell them anything... sometimes I just call it educational sociology ... it does require more explanation than just saying I study social anthropology or other fields that I know of” (SB 15)
- “I have a general idea on what it is about, but it is very difficult to explain and to get other people to understand”(SA 11)

How come that the students find it so difficult to explain their own master programme? One of my respondents (SB 9) concluded that “The problem will be on the part of the receiver, but for me it is easy to explain”, but it can also be interpreted as customer feedback on performance deterioration of the programme itself.

## 5.4 Syllabuses

The syllabus in the two specializations differ accordingly to the two professors views and academic backgrounds, and give the students very different outlooks and starting points to understand the field of comparative and international education. This manifests itself in the choice of theoretical base and geographical focus. Such differences should off course be embraced and looked at as something constructive and useful in a teaching environment, but as we will see below such differences are not perceived as a useful tool, by the students. As it is, they perceive it rather as a confusing element.

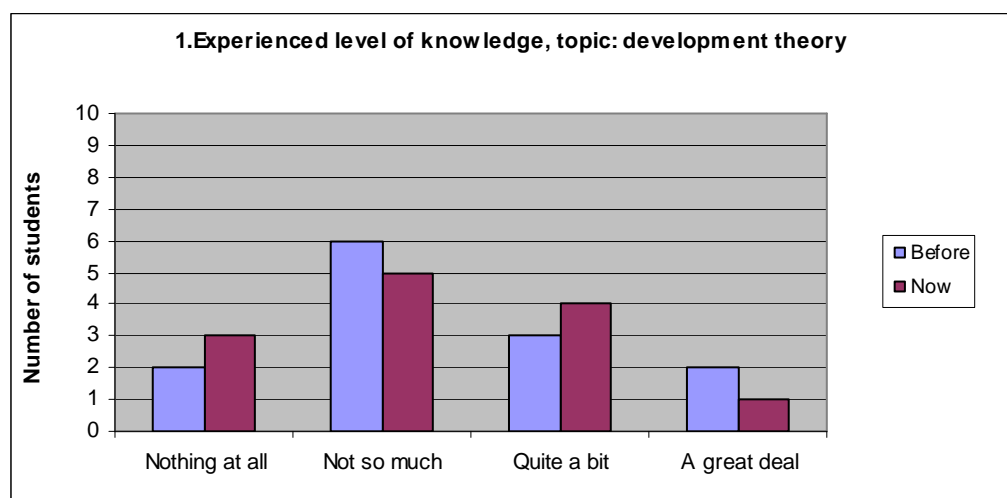
“It is difficult to answer what you miss when you don’t have a clue on what should be in the syllabus.” (SB 6)

At the very basis of the programme is a critical attitude towards a fixed syllabus as such. According to lead professor in specialization B, Education, policy and planning “for a while we tried to omit curriculum as a concept...” Such a radical approach was however not possible to implement within the framework of the academic institution. In this thesis

feedback on the written syllabus is focused along two main lines: Theoretical training and geographical focus and selection of topics. During the interviews it became evident that these issues have been of great importance to the students as all of them had made reflections and thoughts on the subjects.

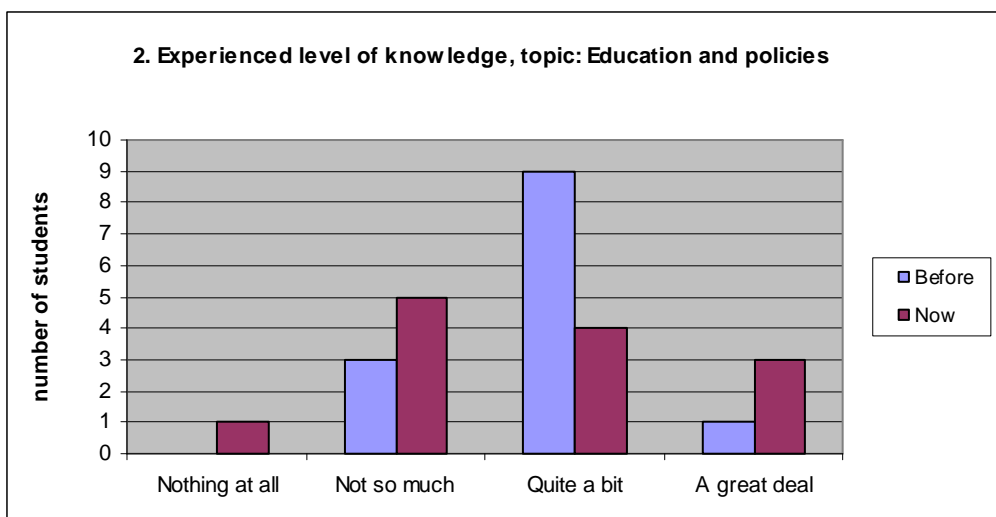
#### 5.4.1 Theoretical training

CIE is an interdisciplinary programme which recruits students from a variety of academic and cultural backgrounds. A brief introduction to theories on development, pedagogy, globalization and didactics were part of the first weeks of the programme. From the questionnaire asking the students to state their experienced level of knowledge before and after the CIE programme, the result with respect to the topic of development theory is depicted in Chart 1. N= 13:



In Chart 1, we can read that 11 out of 13 students experienced their level of knowledge to be constant with respect to the topic ‘development theory’. 1 student experienced to increase her level of knowledge to know “a great deal” as a result of participating in the programme, while 1 student experienced to increase her level of knowledge to know “quite a bit” as a result of programme participation.

In the questionnaire the students were also asked to state their experienced level of knowledge before and after the course, with respect to the topic of ‘education and policies’. The result is depicted in Chart 2: N= 13



From Chart 2, we read that 8 students experienced their level of knowledge to be constant with respect to the topic ‘education and policies’. 2 students seems to have shifted from knowing “quite a bit” to knowing “a great deal”, 2 students have shifted from knowing “quite a bit” to “not so much”, and 1 student seems to have migrated from knowing “quite a bit” to knowing “nothing at all”. With respect to the two last findings there are at least two possible explanations, either there was a misunderstanding of the question in the questionnaire, or the students have become more conscious of their own level of knowledge, and have concluded that their prior knowledge was insufficient.

From these two charts we can conclude that the brief theoretical training given at the beginning of the course doesn’t seem to be sufficient with respect to theory of development. The introduction of policies of education has been somewhat more fruitful to the students. In my in-depth interviews with the respondents a more thorough insight was reached, making it possible to assess their level of satisfaction with the general emphasis of theory in the curriculum. All of the students interviewed commented on the lack of a theoretical framework in the course curriculum. One student said:

- “I expected them to go deeper into the big pedagogy like Freire, and other big theorists such as Bordieu, and Bernstein... I don’t feel like we have learned any theory at all...” (SA 11)

Discussions of concepts, and a general theoretical framework within which to place the various articles were much wanted:

- “...More of the basic maybe, more of the history of the field, what are these thoughts built upon? More about the concepts that we read about, the theories behind them are not explained. I really miss some big theories, more system to put the knowledge into...It’s a pity that we didn’t have some basic books in the beginning, or an introduction to the field before we started. It’s been one and a half year of the programme and I still can’t explain what it is about. Just reading articles from here and there doesn’t make sense if you don’t have a bigger connection.” (SB 6)

The students had definite ideas of which theories could be of relevance to the study:

- “I wanted to know more about the development theories because in the discussions in the classrooms it has often been referred to and mentioned. Take for instance modernization theory, dependency theory, but nobody gave us a clear description of what dependency theory was, and a good lesson in both those theories. We didn’t have any good theory we didn’t have any theoretical knowledge about things.

Theoretical, conceptual philosophical things have not been constructed in a good way, and have not been presented in a good way. To me these are very important because they guide the planning, the details the financing and the policies, all those come when you have theoretical aspirations. Theory of state and theory of political organization would have been useful” (SA 7).

The students were supported by a former staff member who stated that:

- ” I think that the relevant theoretical framework exists but it is not presented, a more heavy emphasis on sociological theories and development theories, these kinds of things haven’t been presented and that has to do with the people working there. That is one of the biggest problems of the programme“(TAB).

In interviews both professors have commented on the theoretical framework of the field, and commented that there are no specific theories of the field, but that they have chosen specific theories to work from that they themselves adhere to and find relevant and useful in order to explain it. The lead professor in specialization B states that:

- “There are no theories on international education, no concrete pedagogic theories for instance. There are a lot of empirical studies, and visions, and then there are some theories on



bachelor level in education but they can't be used. I think the theoretical aspect of the programme has to be covered by updated syllabus and articles on that" (TB).

Interviewing the lead professor in specialization A Education and development, I am left with the impression that the lack of theoretical focus in the curriculum is not accidental but rather a matter of political conviction:

- "I don't know what you mean by theory; most theories are developed in the West or in the North and they don't apply to the situation in developing countries. I think the best one can do is to use more of grounded theory, that you start with looking at what is there, and then you develop your own theory. There are lots and lots of theories, but they don't fit the situations, and they are all designed in the North. So I think it is better not to use any of them. ...
- "The Western theories they do not apply to African conditions. You hardly have theories that can be used. I want everybody to know Nyerere and Freire, those two are the best theories written on education and development, and not Foucault, Bordieu and all of these theorists, they don't know the South, and they are just more or less relevant" (TA).

None of the respondents were satisfied with the amount and or level of theoretical training in the programme. One student found it necessary to combine her CIE programme with masters' courses in development theory at the faculty of social sciences. These findings are devastating when compared to the learning outcomes stated by the Programme: "Participants will be trained in solving complex issues within a wide range of theoretical frameworks and provided with a variety of methodological tools."<sup>20</sup> It is also a crucial factor in giving the students a possibility of critical thinking on the subjects on the curriculum. Without a thorough theoretical framework it is difficult to assess and analyse the topics in the CIE curriculum in a critical manner.

#### **5.4.2 Geographical Outlook and Selection of Topics**

To what extent does the programme provide the students with a broader understanding by the chosen geographical outlook and selection of topics? The divide between the two behind the division of specializations is also visible with respect to geographical focus, selection of

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.uio.no/studier/programme/ciedu-master/om/hva-laerer-du.xml>

topics and angles. In the matter of geographical focus specialization A, Education and development has a strong focus on Africa south of Sahara, while specialization B, Education, policy and planning has a more global perspective including USA, Asia, South America and Europe. The degree of student satisfaction followed this divide, with students in specialization A demanding a broader geographical perspective.

- “Africa is just one part of developing countries and is not the only part developing right now, so we missed some parts about Asia and Latin America... the content was based much on Africa” (SA 2)
- “It’s very Africa, on the syllabus we had only eight articles that weren’t about Africa, that’s not good enough” (SA 11).
- “I am lacking some literature on different parts of the world, there’s a huge concentration on African literature... education is important in Asia and Latin America as well” (SA12).

The students in specialization B, on the other hand were satisfied with the broad geographical perspective presented in the syllabus. Also in the more general matter of topic selection, did the students in specialization A find more to be wanted:

- “There are so many areas that are hot topics right now in education. Like women’s education, refugee education, HIV education, peace education... I would like to have more of that” (SA 11).
- “...we didn’t talk a whole lot about poverty and education, street children... we didn’t talk anything about education in the Middle-East, the Muhammad drawings etc...” (SA 8).

Some of the students also commented on the quality of the readings:

- ” some of the authors we had this year did not hold high enough academic standards, structuring and language should be good indicators of the quality of a text, and the teachers should not add texts just to ensure a wider geographical focus. (SB15)

And after:

- “if we are to read about other places in the world, we also need to know something about the context in which the education exists. What political and economical processes are at play?” (SB15)

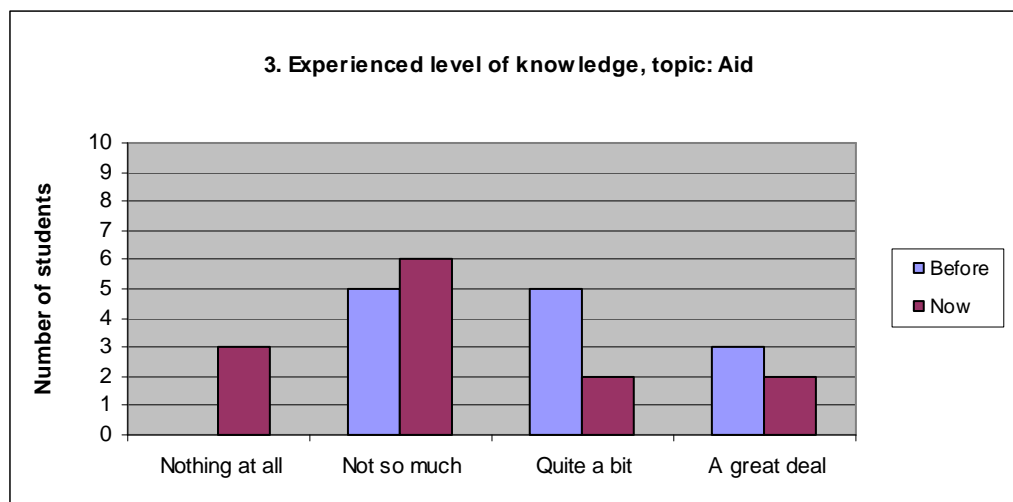
These are both valid and important aspects to consider when revising the syllabus.

Several students experienced a lack of balance both in selection of topics and how the topics were presented:

- “I thought that it would be more articles from the World Bank, because it is the opposite of what everyone is criticizing, ... so that’s what I’ve been missing; the balance of the curriculum and the balance of the teachers“ (SA 13).
- “I get a feeling that you are not allowed to think outside the box, if you think that economics is very important both to aid development and education, that’s not a point of view you are allowed to have because you are supposed to hate the World Bank and the human capital theories.” (SA 11)

Finally it is interesting to take a short look at how they perceived the learning outcome of two of the topics that actually were given high focus, ‘aid’ which had special emphasis in specialization A, and ‘economics of education’ which had special emphasis in specialization B.

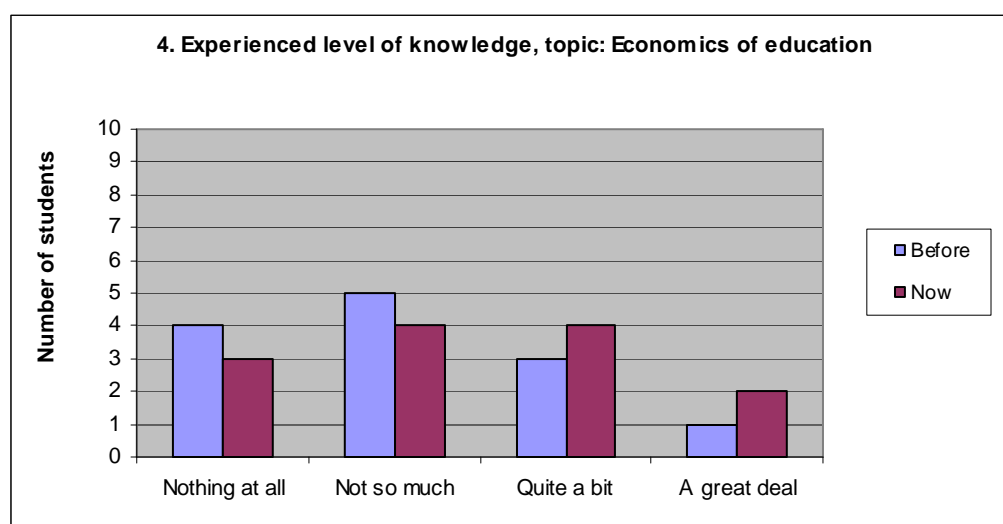
The chart below, chart 3, show the students’ experienced level of knowledge in the topic ‘aid’ before and after participating in the course:



From chart 3 we read that 9 out of 13 students experience their level of knowledge to be constant with respect to the topic ‘aid’, while 1 student seems to have shifted from knowing “a great deal” to “quite a bit” and 3 students seems to have migrated from “quite a bit” to “nothing at all”. With respect to the two last findings there are at least two possible explanations, either that the students have misunderstood the questionnaire, or that the

students have become more aware of the limits of their own knowledge, and found it to be more limited than they had expected it to be.

Chart 4, below, show the experienced level of knowledge with respect to the topic ‘Economics of education’:



In Chart 4, we can read that 11 out of 13 students experienced their level of knowledge to be constant with respect to the topic ‘economics of education’. 1 student experienced to know “a great deal” as a result of participating in the programme, while 1 student experienced to know “quite a bit” as a result of programme participation.

The interdisciplinary character of the programme and the students assigned to it is an explanatory factor to take into consideration while evaluating these results. If the programme and its curriculum is designed to fit a variety of academic backgrounds providing general knowledge as a basis for the students’ particular field of interests, the results makes more sense. Below we shall try to assess how this interdisciplinarity affected the programme.

## 5.5 Interdisciplinarity

The programme is interdisciplinary and designed to provide post-graduate training for academics of different backgrounds: social scientists, humanity scholars and natural scientist. The students participating as respondents in my research have the following academic background: Six trained teachers, three BAs from the Humanities (Philosophy, English and

Theology), five BAs Social sciences (Social Anthropology, Sociology, Development Studies, Education) and one BA Natural sciences.

All respondents, irrespective of specialization, were positive to the interdisciplinary character of the programme:

- “I found it very interesting, to get a bigger perspective on the concepts of international education, because by background it just the pedagogical... (SB 6)
- “Yes, because I remember when we were discussing you know, and then somebody would say that from a sociological point of view...” (SB 1)
- “It was enriching the course, benefiting from each others disciplines and backgrounds...” (SB 9)

The interdisciplinary character of CIE master is a golden opportunity to share and combine different academically strengths into one field, and is recognized as such by the students. Digging a bit deeper into the problematic however potential for improvement was articulated. Some of the students saw the need for creating a common theoretical platform to bridge the gap between the various disciplines:

- “... to give an introductory course which introduces both the comparative and international education, what are the theories and things in pedagogy, social sciences and other fields, and make space and give room for things to come together.” (SA 7)
- “I think this is a problem in general that the disciplines and fields make their own concepts to deal with what they are researching and when they try to talk to each other they have different names for the same thing, or equal names for different things.” (SB 15)

The interdisciplinary character of the programme is however the aspect towards which the students are most positive, and thus presents one of the most fruitful points of departure for a further development of the CIE programme.

## **5.6 A general finding**

Although not a part of this evaluative thesis, one other quite important factor has come to light -shortage of staff.

All staff members and some of the students identified a need for increased staffing. As the programme only has two full time staff, many of the students felt that they didn't get the necessary feed back and support during their study period because of this. They wished that there had been one main teacher with an overview of things, that followed their academic achievements and that had time for questions. Not only bearing in mind this feedback but also all the other challenges brought to light by the students, it seems necessary to employ additional members of staff in order to cope with these.

One of the biggest problems what staff is concerned has been the absence of one of the two full time professors when on sabbatical. This has caused remaining staff to be under even more time pressure, and students to feel more confused and isolated as a student at the CIE programme. Continuity is an important factor for the students in order for them to trust the seriousness of the programme. The cohort of 2006-2008 experienced the abovementioned confusion and the lack of a satisfactory replacement when one of the main professors was on sabbatical. One of the students commented that he was not satisfied with the academic level. "We need experienced teachers; it has not been good enough."

## 5.7 Comparing findings with Mtsewiga

As mentioned earlier Mtsewiga's findings are both different and similar to mine. Like me she has focused on the students' learning outcome, operationalized through various questions regarding syllabus, teachers' performance, selection of topics and geographical focus. But unlike me she also asked questions related to the students social life in Norway and their feeling of inclusion. Her overall focus was on the experienced practical outcome of the study with respect to job opportunities, promotion and societal value. While my point of departure was to examine if/how/to which extent the programme meets *its own requirements* with respect to learning outcome. Only shared aspects will be discussed here. Another important difference is also that her study was limited to students with the same national background, Tanzania, and that her interviews were conducted in their first language.

Mtsewiga's findings can be grouped in two subdivisions, 1: findings related to general aspects of being a student at a welfare state University i.e. the University of Oslo, and 2: findings related to particular aspects of being a student at the CIE programme. Her findings

related to general aspects of studying in Norway show that the students were to a large degree satisfied:

- The professors were good “they are trying their best, and willing to involve students in the learning process” (Mtsewiga 2006:58)
- Positive learning environment, not authoritarian but based on dialogue “the professors were facilitators and not dictators” (Mtsewiga 2006: 85)
- Assessment through oral examination was good in developing students’ confidence
- Staff kept to the time schedule
- The libraries in Norway were well equipped with current and relevant study materials
- “I was happy that the books recommended by the teachers actually existed in the library when she searched for them”
- High speed services like internet and use of online materials
- Increased proficiency in Microsoft Word and English skills
- Good provision of social security
- Clean drinking water

Some students however, found it difficult to adjust to this type of learning environment, used to “spoon feeding”.

How then does this feedback correspond with my findings? My survey encompassed the whole class regardless of citizenship, and I had no questions related to extracurricular aspects of being a student at the University of Oslo, thus there are few parallels to be drawn on the above findings.

But both Mtsewiga and I had questions related to particular aspects of the CIE programme and here the parallels are significant. In the list of her findings, below, all were supported by findings in my own research, apart from the third bullet point below.

- The course syllabus was too compressed, should be more specializations
- Too much focus on ‘Language of instruction’ in specialization A
- Thorough knowledge of their home country “one was able to understand the present situation of our country and what foreigners do to us”

- To much focus on South Africa and Tanzania, other African countries were missing from the syllabus in specialization A
- To little focus on Africa in specialization B
- Lacking topics: gender, school drop out, HIV/aids, leadership in schools evaluation and measurement financing of education and school inspectorate
- Lack of language skills both students and teachers
- Not enough contact hours for the research methodology course
- Students were mislead by informal information that came from fellow students on thesis delivery

But even if the findings were significantly parallel her conclusion differs equally significantly from mine. Mtsewiga(2006) concludes that” even if there were criticism concerning poor quality due to poor English language from some of the teachers, few contact hours for the research methodology course, lack of an African scenario in specialization B (... ) these were offset by positive learning environments, good library services, good and up to date courses and good assessment practices” (Mtsewiga 2006:62).

Her positive conclusion reveals how the general positive experience of being a student at the University of Oslo, Norway, influences the overall assessment of the CIE programme. Another important aspect with high explanatory value is the fact that regarding the students’ experienced relevance of their MPhil degree from CIE upon returns to Tanzania however, all students reported that their degree had facilitated their eligibility in the job market and were convinced of their studies’ societal value.

## 5.8 Concluding remarks

The interviews and the qualitative questionnaire gave the students voice possibility in that they could express their level of customer satisfaction. The findings revealed a substantial potential for improving the experienced learning outcome of the CIE programme. Very few students experienced that their level of knowledge on core topics in the two specializations had improved as a result of participating in the course. They lacked theoretical training, they found the syllabus to be too limited with respect to geographical focus and selection of topics, and they thought that the organization of the programme was confusing. The findings



suffice to indicate that the programme does not fulfil its own ambitions to have an approach which is:

“ interdisciplinary and emphasises the acquisition of a broad understanding of and a critical outlook on educational institutions, systems and their programmes and curricula, stressing an understanding of the political, cultural, socio-economic and technological aspects of educational development and change. ... Participants will be trained in solving complex issues within a wide range of theoretical frameworks and provided with a variety of methodological tools.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.uio.no/studier/programme/ciedu-master/om/hva-laerer-du.xml>

## Chapter 6 Conclusion

The MPhil programme in Comparative and International Education was launched in 1998 as an expression of an increased international orientation by the University of Oslo. As a means to strengthen North-South cooperation, the programme itself became part of the globalization of higher education. Ten years have passed and the programme appears to be one of the most successful investments of the Faculty, measured in high application rates, high production of academic workload credits, above average examination results, a substantial PhD production and low drop-out rates. The reason for questioning the quality of the programme, in spite of these good results was based on my own experiences as a student in the programme.

The programme's description of learning outcome was chosen as the point of departure for an evaluation of the programme. In-depth interviews were conducted with a sample of 13 students and 3 staff members, all students also answered a qualitative questionnaire. By this method my aim was to map the students' *experienced* learning outcome. The findings might indicate for CIE a parallel to Marcellus classic line in Hamlet, that "something is rotten in the state of Denmark".

A thorough evaluation of the programme with respect to organization of the programme, syllabuses, interdisciplinary challenges and potential, or the experienced learning outcome has not been done since the programme started. Nor has any thorough revisions been done. The CIE programme should consider to go through an external evaluation as the evaluations made by me and others are affected by biases from having been a part of it. An external evaluation might discover other results, and rest on higher research quality and thus create a better starting point to implement the necessary changes discussed in this thesis. Mtsewiga performed a study similar to mine based on feedback from Tanzanian students who were part of the programme from 1998-2006. Her findings correlated with mine in one major aspect, a low level of satisfaction on certain aspects of the programme.

Keeping in mind Hirschman's theory of customer satisfaction, voice, exit, loyalty, one would expect the students' to have used their exit possibility to drop out of the programme. And yet this was not the case. The programme has had low drop-out rates throughout its history. A further examination of Mtsewiga's findings gave a strong indication that there were other reasons why the students stay: high level of satisfaction with general aspects of being a

student at the University of Oslo, and a high appreciation of extra curricular aspects related to living in Norway. But even students with a Western national background are inclined to continue their study until graduation. My hypothesis is that having made a commitment to study abroad in a high cost society like Norway, one would be inclined to stay loyal to one's own decision. Explaining the low drop-out rate of students was however beyond the scope of my study, this guess will remain an untested hypothesis.

I used my thesis as an opportunity for students and staff not only to describe how they experienced the CIE programme, but also to respond to challenges and areas of improvement they had considered during their time in it. It was important to give the respondents time and to be open for new aspects and angles along the way. An additional challenge for me as a researcher was to be aware of my own biases and how they affected the research, highlighted when comparing findings with Mtsewiga's research.

The student's feedbacks touched up on many of the same challenges, in spite of differing academic and cultural background. Main areas of challenge have been: the structure of the programme with emphasis on the division of it, the syllabus, and hereunder specifically its strong geographical focus on Africa, and a range of topics found lacking, such as HIV/Aids, Women's education, etc. The lack of a clear theoretical base of the field and the concepts necessary to grasp the field of comparative and international education was mentioned by most of the students.

This thesis has sought to explore whether or not the CIE programme reaches its goals in giving the students: a broad understanding" and "training in solving complex issues within a wide range of theoretical frameworks", and a "critical outlook". Both skills and attitudes are expressed as learning outcomes in the programme's description.

In order to examine these goals of learning further I formulated three main research questions at the beginning of this thesis:

1. Have the students acquired an attitude of critical outlook and broad understanding of comparative and international education as a result of participating in the programme?
2. Have the students' been trained in solving complex issues within a wide range of theoretical frameworks during the programme?

3. How can this acquisition/lack of acquisition be explained by analyzing the educational curriculum applied in the course?

All the research questions were answered.

The rest of this chapter will be organized accordingly, and answer these questions, as well as giving recommendations to the organizers of the programme.

### **Have the students acquired an attitude of critical outlook and a broad understanding of comparative and international education as a result of participating in the programme?**

In order to discover whether the students had gained a critical outlook from the programme, it was important to establish whether or not the students were given the necessary tools to practise critical thinking and acquire a broad understanding of the field. It was also important to map their pre- and post-programme knowledge on some main issues found in the programme. As evident in the findings almost all of the students, felt that their attitudes had been confirmed or not altered at all as a result of the programme. Many did in fact feel that their ability of critical thinking was compromised as the main professors running the programme let their own individual political, and pedagogical agendas dominate the programme.

Some experienced that it had become more important to hold on to previously held attitudes that were experienced to be more nuanced and reflective than those promoted through the programme. The conflicting views of the two professors responsible for the two specializations were reported as a challenging experience, affecting all parts of the programme, its structure, content and organization. This divergence was confirmed by the staff members when interviewed. The two specializations have differed immensely in their focus, and this has also affected the content of the syllabuses. All interviewees have commented on this, and given specific recommendations to the organizers of the programme. Many of the informants touch up on the geographic focus. The students also commented that the syllabus was not nuanced enough, and that they missed articles from the opposing parties on all issues of the syllabus. There is criticism from both specializations in that the programme is not varied enough. A greater variety of articles from all continents is wanted.

The students experienced central topics to be lacking in the curriculum, such as women's education, and they complained of insufficient and superficial training in major theories and conceptual frameworks. None of the students had experienced that the interdisciplinary potentiality of the programme and the students enrolled had come to use in this context. When asked to what extent they were able to explain the field of comparative and international education to others, most students answered that they usually started by explaining their bachelors level degree and what the CIE was in connection to it, or by presenting their thesis title. This shows insecurity about the field, and its characteristics. Event though the students were represented with some main categories of pedagogical thinking and a brief touch on development theory the first two weeks of the programme this does not suffice: the students will still graduate with a lack of clarity about the field they have graduated in and how this field affects their knowledge.

Keeping in mind the definition of critical thinking as “an academic competency in performing a skilled and active interpretation and evaluation of observations and communications, information and argumentation, we see that the programme did not equip them with the tools necessary to acquire a broad understanding of comparative and international education. As an important pillar of the academic tradition such an environment should be on the top of the organizers agenda. Teaching in the field of comparative and international education, where academic and cultural backgrounds have a lot to offer as far as critical outlook and dialogical approach is concerned, it is a pity that the students did not experience this. To meet the requirements a thorough revision of the programme's curriculum, organization and structure must be done.

### **Have the students' been trained in solving complex issues within a wide range of theoretical frameworks during the programme?**

To evaluate whether or not this aspect of the programme's intended learning outcome was achieved it was necessary to look not only at *what* was being discussed, but also at *how* it was discussed. Where the students taught how to think about thinking? Were the students challenged to review their own presumptions? Were the students presented with a wide range of theoretical frameworks?

Questions concerning a theoretical and conceptual framework to work from were constantly reoccurring in my interview responses. A theory poor syllabus has led the students to wonder if the field has any theoretical background at all. It is problematic that this is not discussed thoroughly in the programme and that the students are not challenged to find and present relevant and useful theories.

As it is now, two different theoretical foundations divide the students' perceptions of the field in the two specializations. The two theoretical views never meet, and they are not challenged internally in each specialization. This also adds to the challenge of getting a critical outlook of the programme, and also to organize and understand empirical articles on the syllabus. Remembering one of the staff member's rather radical approaches to theory:" ... There are lots and lots of theories but they don't fit the situations, and they are all designed in the North so I think its better not to use any of them,". Based on the student's want for a clearer theoretical outline, it might be a good idea either to make this a subject in itself or to revise this attitude all together. It is evident that at the present time the students don't experience to acquire sufficient training in solving complex issues within a wide range of theoretical frameworks during the programme.

### **How can this acquisition/lack of acquisition be explained by analyzing the curriculum applied in the course?**

Unclear aims and goals for the programme seems to have been a challenge since it started in 1998. Although this is to be expected in the early days of the programme,

students in this thesis commented on a lack of a clear communication of aims and goals. In order for a more holistic and a more theoretically grounded programme to exist, the organizers needs to revisit the programme's main objectives and develop new and more constructive goals. A common goal and a strategy to reach these goals across specializations is a crucial factor in this development. It is important to recognize the students need to experience the CIE programme as a unit, and at the same time offer an insight to different areas of comparative and international education in a constructive manner. This has been a challenge that the present organizers, at least according to my interviewees, have been unsuccessful in meeting. And as mentioned in the chapter on findings such lack of constructive team work has become a problem for the students learning outcomes.

In addition the programme must tailor the needs of its different students in a better way. It is as stated by one of the students a need for the programme to recognize the different backgrounds that the students represent, professionally, academically and culturally. That said this does not necessarily implicate a more student centred education, but rather a more background sensitive approach towards the students. This could in turn improve the connection between their previous academic background and the field of comparative and international education. In order for the programme to better serve the student's needs, the new aims must be formed and then clearly communicated and operationalized both on the programme's web pages, and in the introductory weeks of the programme. This will enhance number of satisfied students as their expectations will to a much larger degree be fulfilled.

As mentioned earlier the division in the two specializations has been decisive for the programme in order for it to function. Even so, the division seems to be one of the factors that the students are least pleased with. Many of them commented that maintaining such a division has led them to feel like they have been missing out on an important part of the field. Some of the students have even attended lectures in both specializations in order to broaden their view on comparative and international education. This is not however a viable solution as most classes are run at the same time. The classes should be scheduled in such a manor that attendance is possible in both specialization.

As indicated before this division came into existence because of political, pedagogical and personal differences between the two main professors of the programme. As this division has been problematic for many years it is time to evaluate this practice and look for other solutions. The organization of the programme has been perceived as vague and not logical, and some of the students have commented that there should be more specific specializations in order to cater the needs of the students in a better way, leaving them with more options to choose from.

This division clearly affects the learning outcome of the students, leaving them to feel that the programme in reality encompasses to master degree programmes and not one. A revision of the structure of the programme is needed in order to identify ways to accommodate the challenges commented on by the students. Maybe a more specialized programme with smaller sub – specializations giving the students more choice and a better tailored master programme is a solution. On the other hand a less specialized programme with more classes

together and a focus on how the different issues of comparative and international education relates and interact would perhaps benefit the students. Is difficult to say, but better cooperation between the organizers within the programme is at least a given precondition in order for the students to feel that they are being offered one master programme in one field in comparison to the schizophrenic experiences many of them refer to, as of today.

To summarize it is clear that the CIE programme faces some quite demanding challenges in its near future. In short these revolve around, the vision, structure and content of the programme. When starting next semester with a new organizing professor it is my hope that these challenges will be looked at and handled wisely. With a starting point of internationality and interdisciplinarity the road to reshape and create a constructive learning environment, which provides the students with the ability to think critically, can be walked.

Even though few of the students have experienced to gain a critical outlook as a result of the programme, it is important to emphasise the affect this programme has on the students after graduation. Many of the issues and questions that lead from this programme may equip the students to understand complex issues of education that they meet further down the road. Unlike Mtsewiga (2006) this thesis has been too limited in its scope to explore such affects of the programme any further.

The CIE students have used their opportunity of voice and thereby given direct feedback to the organizers. This is, as Hirschman (1970) identifies, the most constructive way of upgrading and enhancing the quality of any service. The students (the programme's customers) need to be treated with care and respect, and by not challenging them with the opportunity of critical thinking, this is not happening, and the programme is letting them down. A crucial task in the year to come will be to revise and counteract the affects that these differences have had on the programme, and give their customers the service they deserve. Then there will be loyalty.



## Interview Consent Form

The interview will be used as part of the background in the thesis, where the CIE programme's intention and development will be discussed.

All information given during the interview will be anonymous, and treated with confidentiality in the final paper.

Thank you for your time and honesty.

Project title	How does the CIE programme challenge the North/South discourse? _____	
Course/Study	Master in comparative and international education	
City/County	Oslo, Norway	
Date	06.03.08	
Yes	No	I give my permission for...
		this interview to be (audio) taped
		the tape/transcript to be archived
		the information made public

*(signature of interviewee)*

*(signature of interviewer)*

06.03.2008

All questions regarding this project can be directed to

Aurora Nereid

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Phone: 97115049

## Interview guide

1. What expectations did you have when you entered the CIE programme?
2. What ideas and attitudes did you have on North/South relations when you entered the programme?
3. What is your opinion on our teaching?
4. How have you found the organization of the course to be?
5. Have you found the discussions in the classroom to be constructive and of great value?
6. Has it been easy for you to voice your own opinions in the classroom?
7. How have you found the teachers role to be?
8. Have you found the syllabus to be varied and nuanced n discussing North/south relations?
9. Whose voices have been heard on the syllabus?
10. What have you found lacking from the syllabus?
11. Have there been enough theoretical articles on the syllabus?
12. How have you experienced to be a student in an international class?  
what disadvantages and advantages has there been?
13. How have you experienced it to be in a multidisciplinary class?  
what disadvantages and advantages has there been?
14. If you were to explain what the CIE master programme was about to someone else,  
would you find it easy to do so?
15. Have your attitudes and ideas on the relations between North/south change/been  
challenged during the programme?
16. To what extent have your expectations been fulfilled?
17. If you were to offer a recommendation to the organizers of the programme, what would  
it be?
18. Do you have any additional comments?

## **Self completion part**

I promise that your answers will be treated with full confidentiality. They will not be identifiable with you as a person in my report. Please tick the box of your choice and circle the number of your choice below. I appreciate your time and your honesty.

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

Age:

Country of origin:

Specialization within the CIE master programme:

**1. What is your academic background? Please specify your degree with specialization?**

**2 Did your previous academic background touch upon the issues that have been covered in the CIE programme?**

**3. How did you hear about the CIE programme at the University of Oslo?**

**4. Why did you choose the CIE programme?**

**5. On a scale from 1-4 where 1 is a great deal and 4 is nothing at all, how much would you say that you knew about the following concepts when starting the CIE programme? Circle the number of your choice**

**Comparative and international education as a field**

1 a great deal   2 quite a bit   3 not so much   4 nothing at all

**Globalization**

1 a great deal   2 quite a bit   3 not so much   4 nothing at all

**Development theory**

1 a great deal   2 quite a bit   3 not so much   4 nothing at all

**Economics of education**

1 a great deal   2 quite a bit   3 not so much   4 nothing at all

**Education and language**

1 a great deal   2 quite a bit   3 not so much   4 nothing at all

**Educational policies**

1 a great deal   2 quite a bit   3 not so much   4 nothing at all

**Development aid**

1 a great deal   2 quite a bit   3 not so much   4 nothing at all

**Education and culture**

1 a great deal   2 quite a bit   3 not so much   4 nothing at all

**Educational planning**

1 a great deal   2 quite a bit   3 not so much   4 nothing at all

**6. At the present stage of the programme of much do you think you know about the following concepts? Circle the number of your choice.**

**Comparative and international education as a field**

1 a great deal   2 quite a bit   3 not so much   4 nothing at all

**Globalization**

1 a great deal   2 quite a bit   3 not so much   4 nothing at all

**Development theory**

1 a great deal   2 quite a bit   3 not so much   4 nothing at all

**Economics of education**

1 a great deal   2 quite a bit   3 not so much   4 nothing at all

**Education and language**

1 a great deal   2 quite a bit   3 not so much   4 nothing at all

**Educational policies**

1 a great deal    2 quite a bit    3 not so much    4 nothing at all

**Development aid**

1 a great deal    2 quite a bit    3 not so much    4 nothing at all

**Education and culture**

1 a great deal    2 quite a bit    3 not so much    4 nothing at all

**Educational planning**

1 a great deal    2 quite a bit    3 not so much    4 nothing at all

**7. To what degree has your personal point of view /attitudes /beliefs, in relation to the following changed during the programme? Circle the number of your choice.**

**Comparative and international education as a field**

1 a great deal    2 quite a bit    3 not so much    4 nothing at all

**Globalization**

1 a great deal    2 quite a bit    3 not so much    4 nothing at all

**Development theory**

1 a great deal    2 quite a bit    3 not so much    4 nothing at all

**Economics of education**

1 a great deal    2 quite a bit    3 not so much    4 nothing at all

**Education and language**

1 a great deal    2 quite a bit    3 not so much    4 nothing at all

**Educational policies**

1 a great deal    2 quite a bit    3 not so much    4 nothing at all

**Development aid**

1 a great deal    2 quite a bit    3 not so much    4 nothing at all

**Education and culture**

1 a great deal    2 quite a bit    3 not so much    4 nothing at all

**Educational planning**

1 a great deal    2 quite a bit    3 not so much    4 nothing at all

**8. Has the change in your personal point of view/attitude/beliefs been so great that you now hold views which are clearly opposed to what you thought before you started the course?**

☐ **Yes**      ☐ **No**

**9. If YES please give some details below about how your view has changed and on what issue/topic?**

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